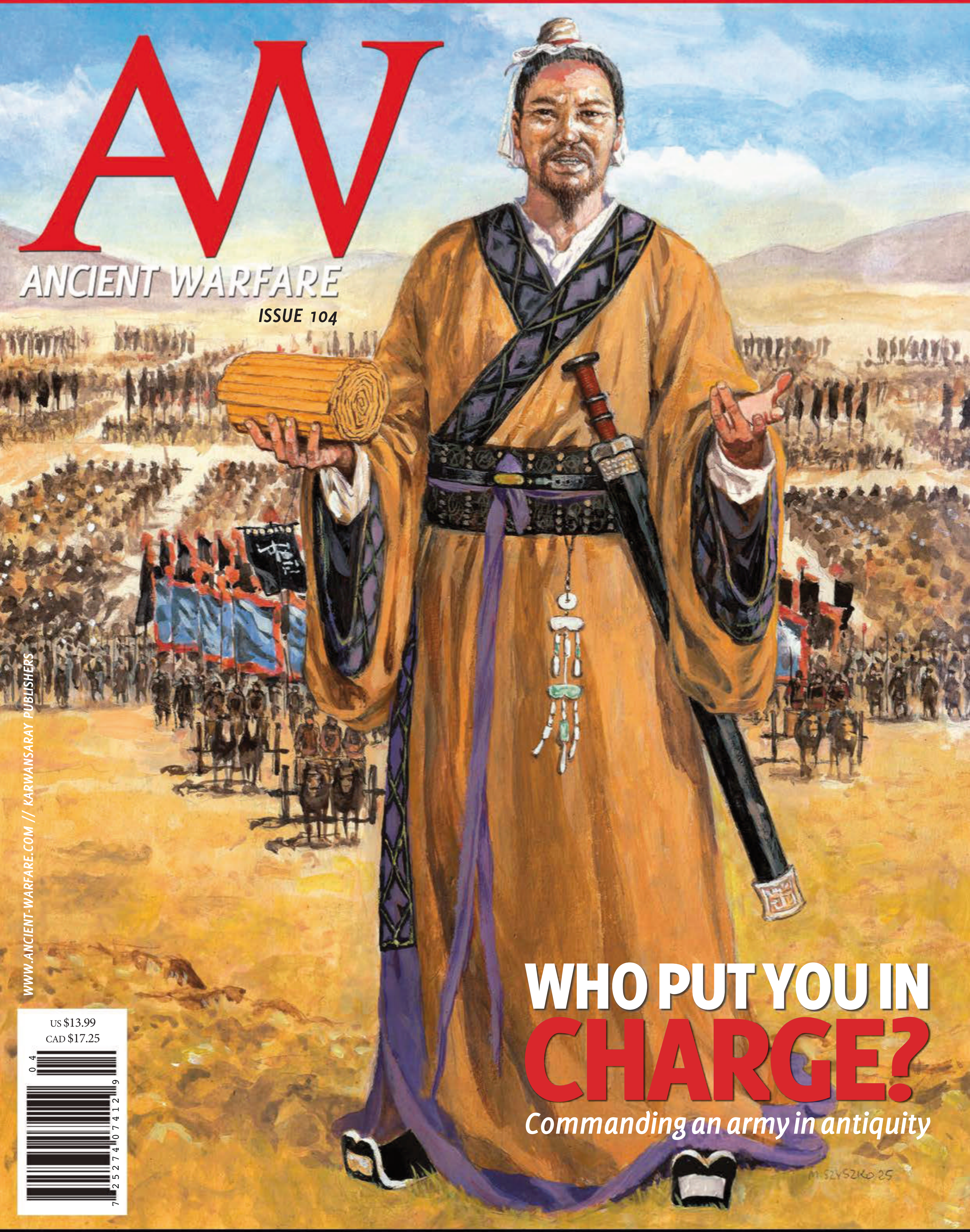
IN THIS ISSUE: OFFICERS, GENERALS, AND KINGS — WHAT IT TOOK TO LEAD AN ANCIENT ARMY



AW

ANCIENT WARFARE

ISSUE 104

WWW.ANCIENT-WARFARE.COM // KARWANSARAY PUBLISHERS

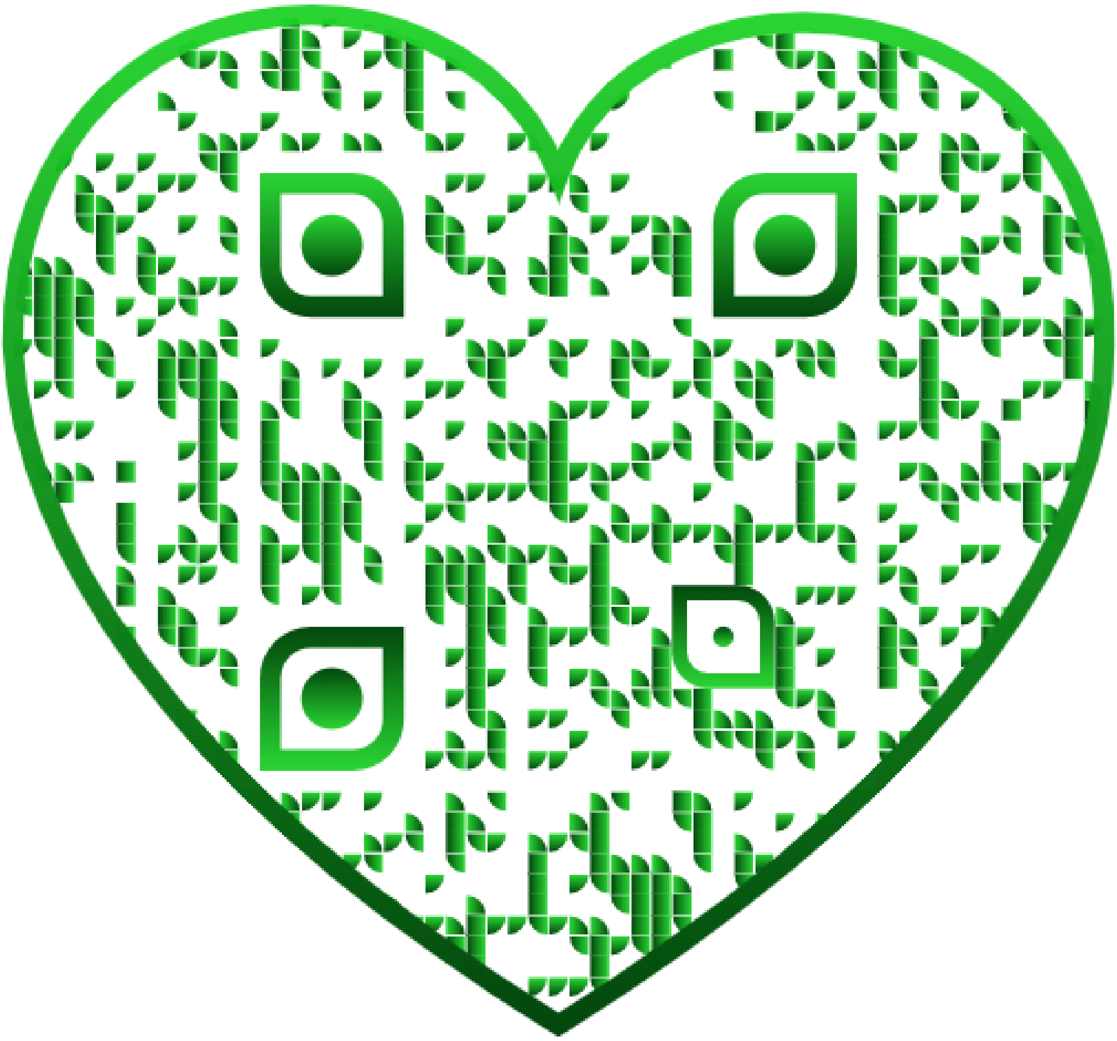
US $13.99
CAD $17.25

WHO PUT YOU IN CHARGE?

Commanding an army in antiquity

THEME – WHO WAS SUN TZU? // THE BATTLE OF ARTEMISIUM // BADLY-BEHAVED CENTURIONS

SPECIALS – NAKED FURY // THE 'YOUNG BUTCHER' // A NEW THEORY CONCERNING THE GREEK *ASPIS*



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ANCIENT WARFARE *magazine*

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Design © 2016-2021 Karwansaray Publishers

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Special thanks: Carole Raddato (followinghadrian.com), Gary Todd (worldhistorypics.weebly.com), and Jona Lendering (livius.org) for their photographs

Print: Grafi Advies

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Customer service: service@karwansaraypublishers.com
Website: www.ancient-warfare.com

Contributions in the form of articles, letters, reviews, news and queries are welcomed. Please send to the above address or use the contact form on www.ancient-warfare.com

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Distribution
Ancient Warfare is sold through retailers, the internet and by subscription. The exclusive distributor for the UK and the Republic of Ireland is Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT, United Kingdom. Phone: +44 (0)207 429 4000.

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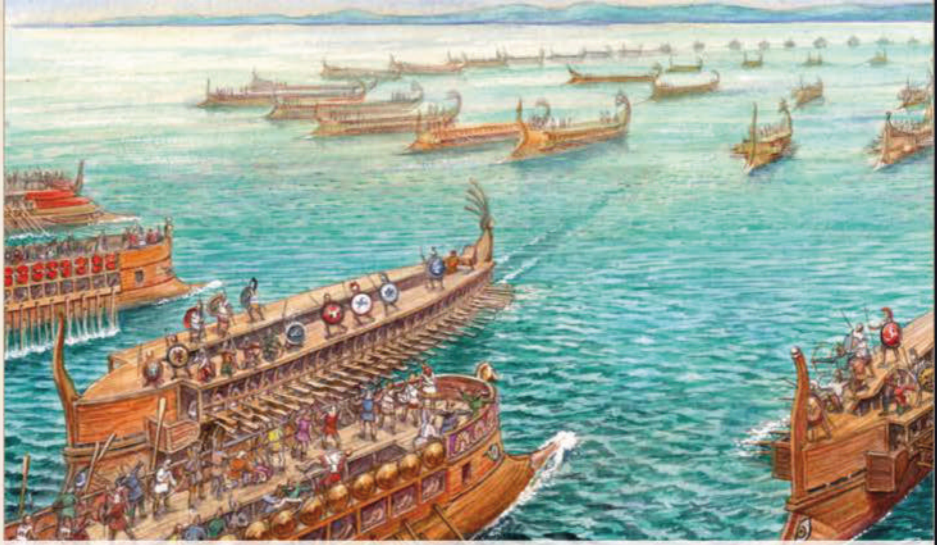
Ancient Warfare is published every two months by Karwansaray B.V., Zutphen, The Netherlands. PO Box 4082, 7200 BB Zutphen, The Netherlands.

ISSN: 1874-7019

Printed in the Netherlands.



THEME: OFFICERS AND GENERALS

How do you get the right man to command your armies? Does he learn on the job, or from books, and what happens when something goes wrong?

20 Who put you in charge?
Historical introduction

22 The burden of command
Republican military leadership

26 The value of experience
Alexander the Great's commanders

28 The Battle of Artemisium
Context and continuity

34 The Battle of Boju
Sun Tzu seals his reputation?

38 Read your way to victory
Texts to help train your commanders

40 Centurions behaving badly
The darker side of the Roman centurion

46 Flexible officers
Lucius Marcius and the disaster in Spain

58 Further reading
More books and articles on the theme

SPECIAL FEATURES

8 The Telamon grip
A theory of shield functionality

12 Generals of the martial emperor
Asserting Han military domiance

18 The 'little' Ludovisi sarcophagus
Great things come in small packages

50 Naked fury
Warriors of the Ixtlan and La Playa

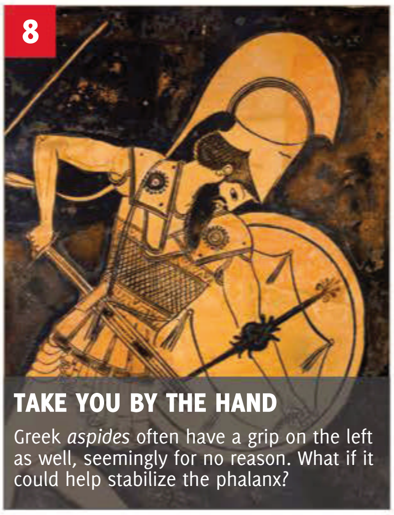
DEPARTMENTS

4 Preliminaries
News and updates

53 *Carnifex Adulescens*
Decrying a betrayer of the state

54 Lost to the sea
The stele of Demokleides

56 Book reviews
New books on ancient military history



TAKE YOU BY THE HAND

Greek *aspides* often have a grip on the left as well, seemingly for no reason. What if it could help stabilize the phalanx?

ANY MAN IN A PINCH?

Imperium — army command — could only be granted by the state. What happened if the army commander unexpectedly died?

EDITORIAL — *Leaders of men*

Surely one of the main interests of military history lies in the human drama that transcends the ages. The big difference between more recent events and ancient military history is that we know far less about the rank and file men in the armies, let alone their life stories. Instead, the emphasis lies on the men at the top, the commanders and generals of what is sometimes called disparagingly 'big men history'.

Somehow it seems just about every issue of *Ancient Warfare* is at least somewhat dedicated to examining the decisions of these generals and, in that respect, you might think the current theme is somewhat redundant. But we do not generally look at how generals were appointed or how they were taught their trade.

While some ancient commanders are remembered as larger-than-life figures that broke every rule society set for them, others are only known from the anecdotes that they left behind. In either case, there is something to be learned. After all, any modern leadership course will still talk about the same issues found in the ancient treatises. In the end, it's all about the people.

Jasper Oorthuys
Editor, *Ancient Warfare*

Bronze Age weapons hoard to go on public display

An Early Bronze Age hoard discovered in Carnoustie, Scotland, has been acquired by National Museums Scotland and will go on display for the first time in a new exhibition opening in summer 2026.

The hoard includes a rare spearhead decorated with gold, dating from ca. 1120-920 BC. The spearhead has an intricately decorated gold-bound socket, one of only two such examples known from Scotland. Alongside the spearhead was found a bronze sword with an unusual lead-tin pommel, still sheathed in the remains of a wooden scabbard. The sword was carefully wrapped in a woven wool garment, fastened with a disc-headed pin; the spearhead blade was wrapped in sheepskin, and the socket was wrapped in a fine woollen cloth. The weapons hint at the existence of a localized warrior elite in the Angus area over 3000 years ago.

The hoard was deliberately and thoughtfully placed near a Bronze Age round structure.

Canaanite blade factory uncovered in Israel

Archaeologists digging in Israel have discovered a 5500-year-old flint blade workshop near Kiryat Gat. Although similar finds have been made in northern and central Israel, this is the first of its kind ever identified in the south of the country. The discovery provides evidence of technological sophistication at the start of the Middle Eastern Early Bronze Age (3500–2000 BC) in southern Israel.

The production technology at Kiryat Gat was very advanced and included the use of a type of crane to exert precise pressure on the flint to achieve uniform results. Professional knappers then finished the blades, which were used as knives for cutting and butchering, and as harvesting tools, such as sickle blades. The most impressive findings discovered at the site are large flint cores, from which extremely sharp, uniformly prism-shaped stone or flint blades were produced. Such blades, predominantly found in Israel and Lebanon, are called 'Canaanite blades'.

"Today, we understand that this site served as a centre, from which Canaanite blades were distributed across broad regions in the Levant," said Dr Jacob Vardi.

© Emil Aladjem / Israel Antiquities Authority

Remains of the ancient manufacturing workshop near Kiryat Gat.

The excavation was carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) before construction of a new residential neighborhood at Nahal Qomem (Gat-Govrin, Zeita). The ancient settlement covered over half a kilometre. It included hundreds of underground pits that served as storage, dwellings, and production or ritual sites.

Flint cores and blades found near Kiryat Gat, which was the location of a Canaanite manufacturing workshop.

© Emil Aladjem / Israel Antiquities Authority

Reconstruction from Michelham Priory of a Bronze and early Iron Age roundhouse as used in the British Isles.

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Bronze Age sword and scabbard remains from the Carnoustie Hoard.

© National Museums Scotland

This is the only Bronze Age weapon hoard from Scotland to be found within a clearly defined settlement, offering a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between these treasured objects and the lives of the people who crafted and used them. The survival of prehistoric textiles and organic material is also extremely rare and reveals an extra layer of the care and attention that went into the formation of the hoard.

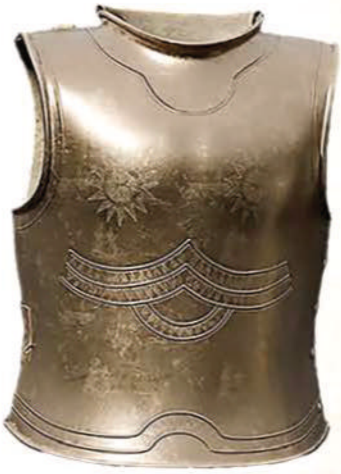
Bronze Age cuirass discovered in Czechia

Archaeologists in the Czech Republic have identified a rare piece of armour dating to the European Early Bronze Age. Brno City Museum has announced that the torso fragment, discovered in South Moravia, is the second known specimen of its kind found in the country.

An inconspicuous, folded sheet of bronze was uncovered during excavations in 2023, which involved both archaeologists and amateur detectorists. "Using 3D scanning, we managed to digitally 'unpack' the bent sheet metal and identify its shape and decoration," said archaeologist Aleš Navrátil of the Brno City Museum. The analysis confirmed that the fragment was part of a warrior's body armour, designed to protect the thorax. The bell-shaped cuirass featured a high collar and simple decoration. Owing to the skill and resources required for its manufacture, it was a type reserved for the elite.

The object formed part of a hoard, which also included a spearhead, sickle, needle, and other metal items. Experts believe the items were deliberately damaged and placed in the ground 3200 years ago, possibly as part of a ritual sacrifice.

The Institute of Archaeology and Museology at Masaryk University assisted with documentation and analysis.



Digital reconstruction of a bell cuirass, which incorporates the torso found in South Moravia, and is also based on a French example from Saint-Germain-du-Plain.

© Martin Košál

Infant burial found in Roman military camp in Spain

Archaeologists have identified what may be the first infant burial within a Roman military context discovered in the Iberian Peninsula. The study, by the Universities of Burgos and León, examined remains excavated in 2006 at the base of *Legio VI Victrix* in León, Spain. The legion was deployed to Hispania

Gallo-Roman terracotta ex-voto representing a swaddled baby from Bavay, ancient Bagacum, Hauts-de-France, France.

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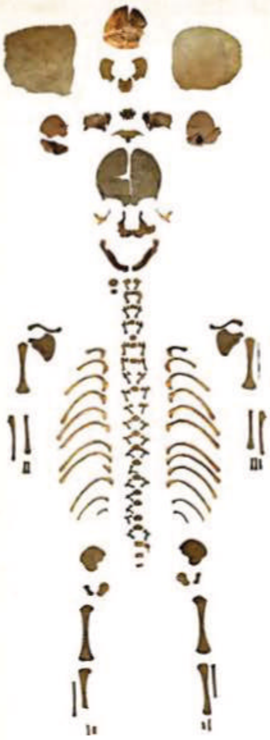


Remains of the infant found in a military context from Leon, Spain. The burial of an infant inside a Roman fort is extremely rare.

© Fernández-Viejo et al. 2025

Tarraconensis in 29 BC to control key routes through the Asturian mountains.

In Sector 1 of the site, a perinatal burial was found beneath the floor of a *contubernium* workshop, placed under a Roman roof tile near a doorway. While infant burials in *tegulae* were a common funerary practice, their presence *within* a military camp is considered highly unusual.

Analysis suggests the infant was carried to term at 38–42 weeks; however, skeletal development indicated poor nutrition or illness during gestation. No evidence of physical trauma was identified, although researchers cautioned that causes such as smothering or exposure would leave no trace. Radiocarbon dating places the burial between 47 BC and AD 61.

Augustan reforms officially barred soldiers from marrying or raising families inside camps. Despite such laws, artefacts linked to women and children have been found at Roman forts elsewhere, suggesting enforcement of the laws was inconsistent. Researchers propose the León burial may represent a transitional period, or possibly a foundation ritual intended to protect the workshop and its occupants.

The research is published in the paper "Uncovering Childhood in the Roman Army: A Perinatal Burial from the Roman *Castrum* of the *Legio* VI in León" in *Childhood in the Past* 18, August 2025.

Maiden Castle's Iron Age 'war cemetery' revisited

A re-examination of human remains from the so-called 'war cemetery' at Maiden Castle, England suggests that they were *not* buried after an attack on the hillfort by the Roman army as commonly believed.

The Maiden Castle burials are highly unusual. Care was taken in the styles of burials, some exhibiting aspects of treatment not seen in any other cemetery in the region. Additionally, there is a concentration of grave goods uncommon in late Iron Age burials for the area, marking the individuals out as elite.

In the *Society of Antiquaries Report* of 1943, Sir Mortimer Wheeler's proposed that the levels of trauma on skeletons found at Maiden Castle were evidence for a Roman massacre in AD 43/44. A new radiocarbon dating programme and reanalysis of the distribution of burials, however, indicate that the inhumations fall into "clusters of lethal violence," plausibly spanning multiple generations, though spread mostly between the early and middle decades of the first century AD. Crucially, the new data obtained illumi-

MORE ONLINE

Read more about the new research:
http://bit.ly/46ERzmh

Thracian warrior buried with ceremonial wreath

Archaeologists in southern Bulgaria have presented their finds from richly furnished graves of a Thracian warrior and a woman dating from the Hellenistic period (late second century BC). The discoveries were made in 2024 during rescue excavations linked to a cable-laying project near the village of Kapitan Petko Voivode, in the Haskovo region.

In one of the burial mounds, researchers identified what they describe as "the richest grave of a Thracian ruler yet found in Bulgaria". The remains of the man, who was about 35–40 years of age, were buried with spears, swords, and a shield. Among the most interesting finds is a gilded silver wreath placed on the dead man's head. A set of gold jewellery decorated with semi-precious stones, a knife with a gold-inlaid handle, and ceramic and glass vessels were also recovered.

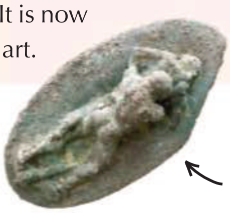
The man was also accompanied by his war horse. The horse burial also yielded gold, silver, and bronze harness ornaments. The bronze-gilt horse harness fittings were decorated with mythological scenes, including Heracles defeating the giant Antaios, son of Poseidon and Gaia. It is now considered a masterpiece of Late Hellenistic art.

Second-century BC burial of a Thracian warrior and his horse, Bulgaria.

© Municipality of Topolovgrad

The second mound contained the coffin of a young woman dating to the early second century BC. She was buried with gold, glass, and bronze objects, a wooden chest decorated with gold and silver plates and semi-precious stones, and two pairs of well-preserved leather shoes.

Many of the artefacts will soon go on display at the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia.



Horse harness pendant of Heracles defeating the giant Antaios from a Thracian warrior burial.

© Municipality of Topolovgrad

A view along the ramparts and ditches of the impressive Iron Age Hillfort known as Maiden Castle in Dorset.

© Hadrianus1959 / Wikimedia Commons

nates a population using an *abandoned* hillfort as a place of selective burial in the decades leading up to the Roman Conquest

"This was a case of Britons killing Britons," Dr Miles Russell said in a statement. "The Roman army committed many atrocities, but this does not appear to be one of them."

The research is published in the open access paper "Fraught with High Tragedy: A Contextual and Chronological Reconsideration of the Maiden Castle Iron Age 'War Cemetery' (England)" in *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 44, May 2025.

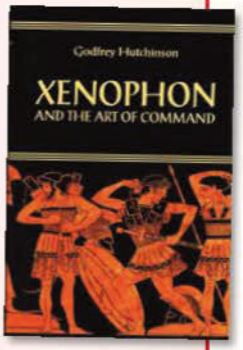
Possible bronze baldric ring, used to attach elements of a sword belt worn across the body.

© Portable Antiquities Scheme

HAVE YOU READ?

By Godfrey Hutchinson

Xenophon and the Art of Command



Hutchinson explores the career of Xenophon, the celebrated commander, historian and essayist, and one-time pupil of the Athenian philosopher Socrates. Elected commander of the surviving Greek forces after the battle of Cunaxa in 401 BC, Xenophon led the men out of the hostile territory. He recorded all this in his *Anabasis* and Hutchinson uses Xenophon's writings to explore, thematically, the timeless themes of command. These include morale, life in camp and 'on the march', secrecy, spies and battle tactics. Hutchinson's work can be used alongside other works which explore the art of command, and these can be compared with more recent titles which look at the same subject through a modern lens. What the reader will discover is that the art of command, in whatever age, remains remarkably similar across a time-span of some 25 centuries.

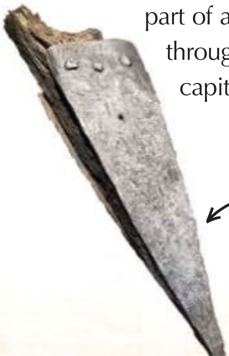
Bridge built soon after Roman conquest of Helvetii

The tips of wooden piles of a Roman bridge dating back more than 2000 years have been uncovered by archaeologists in Switzerland.

At a construction site in Aegerten, staff of the Archaeological Service unearthed more than 300 oak piles preserved in groundwater. The bridge once crossed the Zihl River and stood at the gates of Petinesca (modern Studen), part of an important road that led eastward through the Swiss Plateau via the Helvetic capital of Aventicum (Avenches).

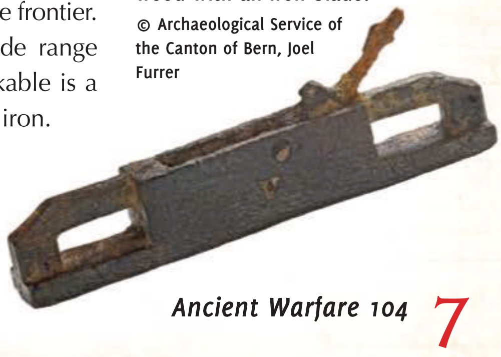
Dendrochronological analysis revealed that the bridge was repeatedly repaired over the four centuries it was in use. The earliest sections date to around 40 BC, soon after Rome's subjugation of the Helvetii under Julius Caesar in 58 BC. The latest phase dates to AD 369, under Emperor Valentinian, when the region was increasingly fortified behind the Rhine frontier.

Archaeologists recovered a wide range of artefacts, among the most remarkable is a large carpenter's plane of wood and iron.



Roman iron reinforcements for wooden piles from the River Waal, Wamel, the Netherlands.

© Lauren van Zoonen



Fully preserved, large carpenter's plane made of a single piece of wood with an iron blade.

© Archaeological Service of the Canton of Bern, Joel Furrer

© The Greek Phalanx

Reenactors of *The Greek Phalanx* face off at Fort Loudon, Pennsylvania. Note the lone javelineer at the back.

A THEORY OF GREEK SHIELD FUNCTIONALITY

THE TELAMON GRIP

By Andrew Yamato

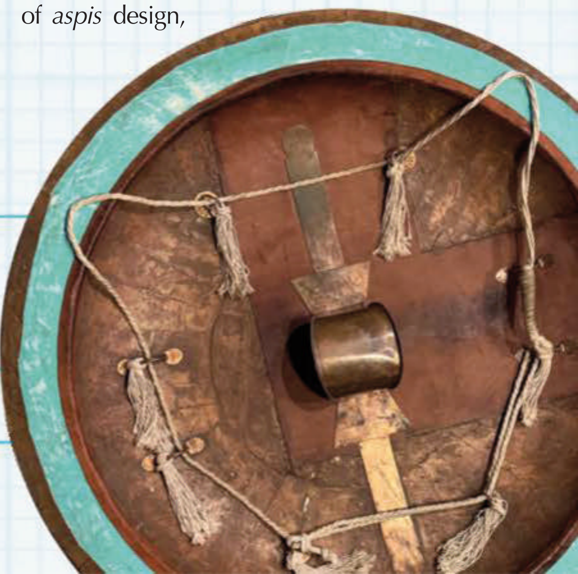
A *Telamon* is a Homeric term for the strap by which large Bronze Age shields were slung and swung around the bodies of heroes in the *Iliad*. It has also come to describe, perhaps anachronistically, the rope or cord looped around the interior of Archaic and Classical hoplite *aspides* (or "Argive shields") through a series of bronze attachment points. In that later context, its purpose has always been something of a mystery.

The simplest and most logical explanation is that the *telamon* can be configured to carry the *aspis* on the bearer's back, which is not only attested in artwork, but has been found by reenactors to be both comfortable and practical: slack length is pulled into two shoulder loops at the top of the shield, with the horizontal *porpax* (the arm band) fitting into the small of the wearer's back. The various spans of cord between the bronze fittings are, moreover, useful for tucking extra clothing, bedding, or other personal items.

Author and *AW* contributor Paul Bardunias has speculated (http://bit.ly/3KrAnIh) that the telamon might be a vestigial element carried over from an earlier iteration of the shield: a tightly drawn internal truss serving to reinforce a concave shape once made of wicker, and that could theoretically strengthen even a wooden core. The main problem with this theory is that the *telamon* is almost invariably depicted slack, not taut, and the weight of the rope and its bronze fittings seem a high price to pay for a nod to obsolete tradition.

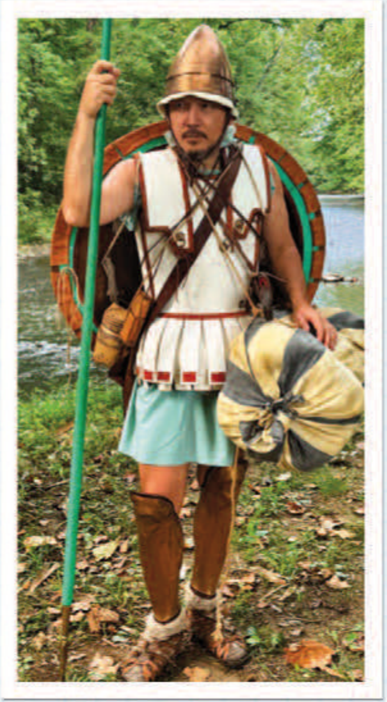
Cord and grip

A third theory is based on the fact that the same slack length can alternatively be pulled through the secondary *antilabe*, frequently seen on the interior left of the aspis, creating a loop just long enough to be held taut in the shield hand of the hoplite to the bearer's left, along with his own *antilabe* — something I like to call the "telamon grip". Such an arrangement creates a physical yet flexible connection down the length of a phalanx rank which reenactors have found helps maintain cohesion, especially over broken ground. It also makes sense of another mystery of *aspis* design,



A reconstructed *aspis* with the *telamon* pulled into loops for portage on the back. Note the bronze attachments creating two *antilabes*.

© The Greek Phalanx



© The Greek Phalanx

The author in marching order, wearing his *aspis* on his back by way of the *telamon* loops.

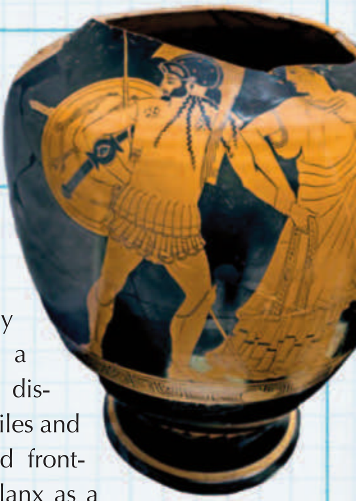
which is that secondary *antilabe* itself. This is often described as a ‘spare’, useful if the primary *antilabe* breaks. In theory, the bearer could simply flip the shield upside down and have a functional shield again. This manoeuvre must be dismissed as both unnecessary — I've never heard of a broken *antilabe* — and totally impractical in the heat of battle violent enough to require it. And yet we frequently find this odd fixture depicted in art and present on artifacts themselves (most notably the Bomarzo Shield): it must have served some purpose. Indeed, I believe that along with the *telamon*, the secondary *antilabe* may hold the key to understanding several key aspects of hoplite warfare.

While the precise location of its fittings may have varied from one *aspis* to another, a *telamon* long enough to produce shoulder loops generally creates a telamon grip loop long enough to maintain an ergonomic overlap of two *apsides*' offset rims, translating to a frontage of approximately 75cm per hoplite. This is ideal for phalanx combat, providing both sufficient space for wielding the spear, and the defensive stability of an overlapping shieldwall. As with any linked chain, however, the telamon grip only provides linear consistency when under tension.

In the field

My reenactment group, The Greek Phalanx, learned this the hard way during experiments at Fort Loudon, Pennsylvania. With helmets restricting peripheral vision and attention focused on singing our *paean*, our line of fifteen shields repeatedly collapsed on itself while advancing, even with most of us using the telamon grip. If maintaining a straight and evenly spaced frontage was so difficult for a handful of hoplites advancing in a single rank, how could phalanxes four, let alone fifty, shields deep and hundreds wide have maintained consistent cohesion in the face of the enemy?

If current scholarship is to be believed, the answer is not training. While I suspect that citizen hoplites had more military training than surviving texts attest, our experience suggested that coordinating even basic manoeuvres for massive phalanxes on an ancient battlefield would have required more and better formation training than all but the best-drilled Spartiates and *epilektoi* (selected soldiers) — even they seem to have failed at combat manoeuvres as often as they succeeded. Instead, I suspect the answer may lie in the telamon grip combined with a single, simple mantra, handed down as a battlefield axiom from father to son: “Grasp the rope to your right, pull it taut to the left.”

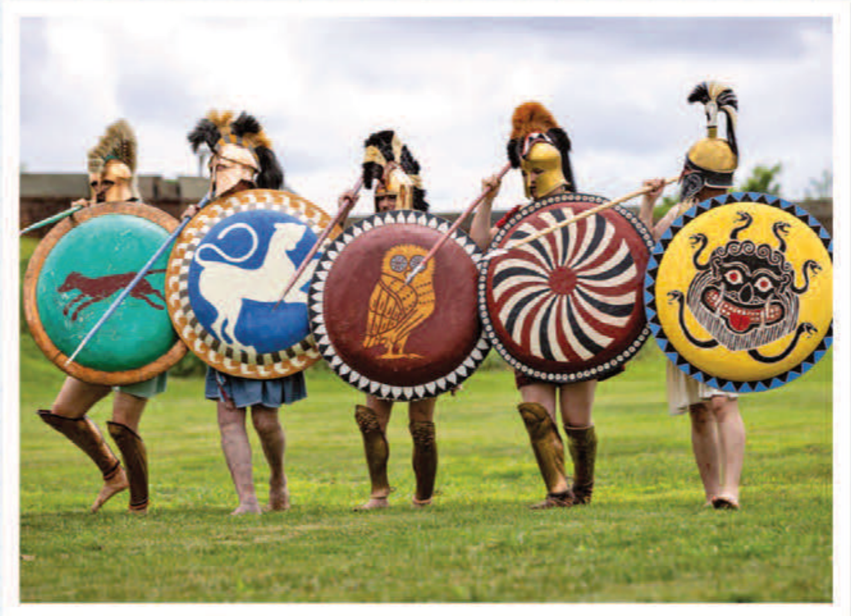


A fifth-century BC Attic vase depicting a hoplite with an *aspis* fitted with a *telamon* and secondary *antilabe*.

© ArchaiOptix / Wikimedia Commons

A front rank so dressed quite effortlessly maintains both a standard fixed distance between files and a standard fixed frontage for the phalanx as a whole, without the need for the extensive formation training otherwise essential to maintain such cohesion. The hoplites of each subsequent rank could then simply follow the men directly in front of them without the need for the telamon grip themselves.

A phalanx regulated by the telamon grip may also help explain why *strategoi* were posted at the far right of the front rank in the first place (if one accepts that they generally did so). Traditionally understood as the “position of honour,” the difficulties of being seen and heard from this location at the extremity of the formation make it less than ideal for *command*, but it is the only place from which the phalanx could actually be *controlled*. As long as the spacing of that first rank is maintained consistently, with each man remembering to keep his right hand neighbour's *tel-*



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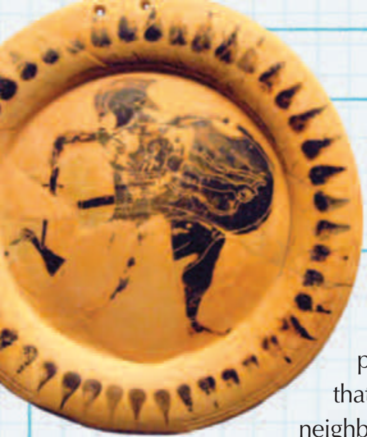
Reenactors of *The Greek Phalanx* advancing using the telamon grip to maintain their line.



An Attic plate from the mid sixth century showing a running hoplite with a Boeotian shield also fitted with a telamon.

© Dan Diffendale / Flickr

amon pulled taut (but not pulling so hard that he pulls his neighbour to the left), it allows a *strategos* posted on the far right of the front rank to not only order the phalanx forward, but actually gives him a limited ability to literally *steer* the entire formation, simply by moving in the desired direction.

Interestingly, the telamon-grip-regulated phalanx permits one significant variation: total reversal, with the *strategos* posting on the extreme front left and the front-ranker *promachoi* pulling right — a feat requiring some preparation and practice, but nothing beyond Epaminondas and his Thebans (among others). Indeed, for better-trained hoplites, the telamon grip may even have expedited the next level of linear tactics: wheeling (i.e. facing changes while maintaining a straight frontage). The linear formations of black powder armies wheeled by training soldiers to "lean in, look out" — that is, to physically lean into the body of the next man toward the posted turning point and "look out" down the radius of the line to the far end of the flank executing the turn. A rank of hoplites linked by the telamon grip could, when given a wheeling order by a leader posted on the flank, execute the manoeuvre simply by "looking out," without the need for physical compression, thus maintaining their tactically optimal spacing. It is perhaps by just such a practiced technique that the Spartans were able to repeatedly execute their famous *cyclosis* manoeuvre to envelop the enemy's left flank.

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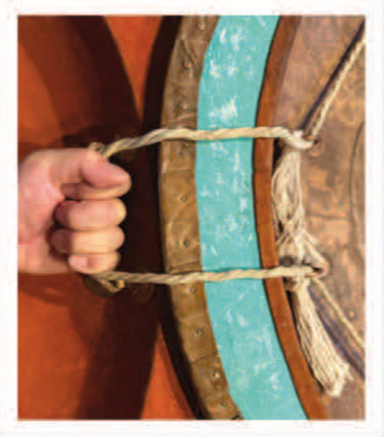
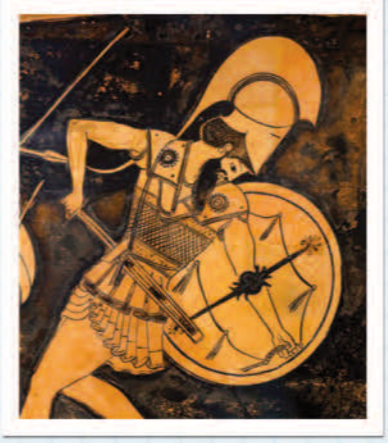
Hoplites clashing shield to shield on the fourth-century BC Nereid monument.



© The Greek Phalanx

A *telamon* pulled through the secondary antilabe to form a linked phalanx by way of the *telamon* grip.



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A hoplite on a fifth-century BC Attic vase with a detailed view of the inside of his *aspis* and a slack *telamon*.

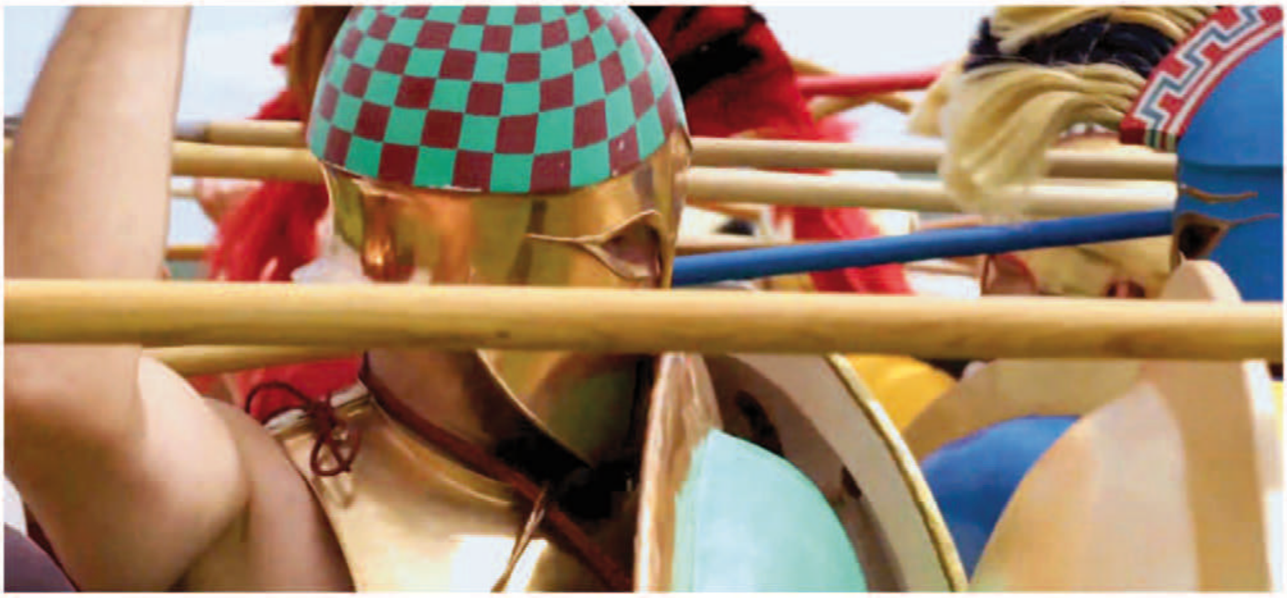
Pros and cons

Would the telamon grip have consistently worked to regulate entire phalanxes? Certainly not, but it's difficult to conceive of a simpler, more practical approach to cohesively manoeuvring a massive mob of untrained, nervous hoplites. As the *paean* was raised and the advance began, there would be no need for any front-ranker to remember anything over their pounding hearts but "pull left." Such a mantra might even have worked to counter the rightward drift famously described by Thucydides in his account of the battle of Mantinea. It would certainly have deterred individuals from overenthusiastic sallies (per *Hellenika* 7.1.31: "the soldiers were inspired with so much strength and courage that it was a task for their leaders to restrain them as they pushed forward to the front") or frightened hesitation, serving as a constant, physical reminder to maintain the line and pace at all costs — nothing less, nothing more. As a formation tactic it would have been — at the very least, and however imperfectly executed — far better than nothing, which is essentially all the current conventional wisdom allows.

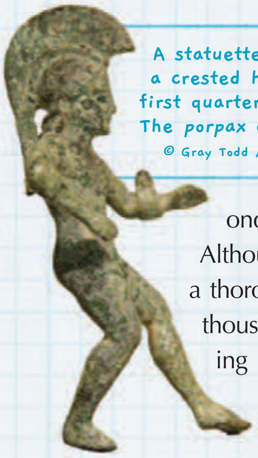
The telamon grip would ideally be maintained at least until the enemy was directly engaged, whether by a mass charge to collision or more measured spear-fencing. At that point, as the battle inevitably disintegrated into more local and individual combat, hoplites could release their neighbors' *telamones*, sacrificing a physically linked shield wall to gain greater freedom of action. By permitting the *strategos* to bring a cohesive phalanx to meet the enemy, the telamon grip had probably done its job; it was fundamentally a tool of manoeuvre rather than melee.

It is true that many *aspides* are depicted on vases without a *telamon*, sec-

© The Greek Phalanx



The author participating in hoplite combat as a member of *The Greek Phalanx*. Note how the shoulder neatly fits into the shield rim.



A statuette of a hoplite wearing a crested helmet and dated to the first quarter of the fifth century BC. The *porpax* of his shield remains.

© Gray Todd / Flickr

ondary *antilabes*, or either. Although I have not performed a thorough survey of the many thousands of artworks featuring *aspides*, the secondary *antilabe* in particular appears to be more frequently seen in Classical rather than Archaic art, which may indicate it was an innovation of that era (the Bomarzo shield itself dates to the fifth or fourth century.) If so, it would correspond to the advent of the closely ordered Classical phalanx — a phenomenon increasingly thought to have dated to the time of the Persian Wars — with its greater need for cohesion than the looser Archaic phalanx it supplanted.

Our sample of intact *aspis* artefacts is too small to conclusively determine how commonplace secondary *antilabes* might have been. As has been noted, however, the telamon grip would only need to be used by a minority of hoplites (i.e. the front rank) to be effective in maintaining a phalanx. It is plausible that *aspides* so equipped were issued to specially trained select units like Thebes' Sacred Band, whose primary role as the front line "cutting edge" (if one accepts that theory of their deployment) may not even have been to fight fiercely, but rather to maintain their massive phalanx's consistency and cohesion.

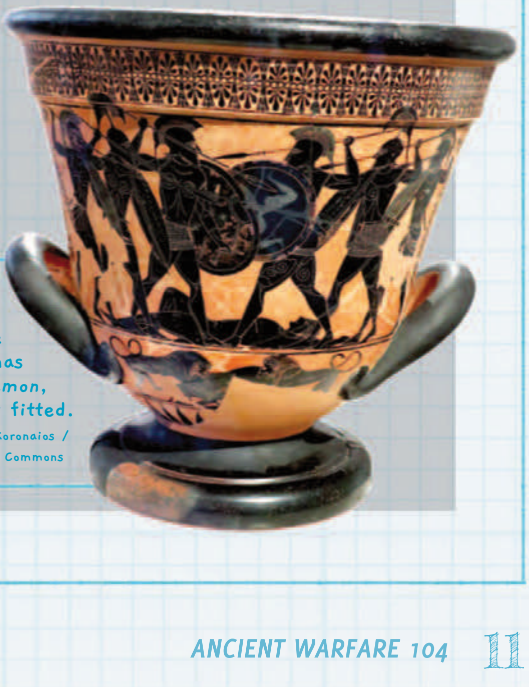
The developmental origins of the *aspis* remain shrouded in mystery and speculation, and we may never know the intention behind either the *telamon* or the secondary *antilabe* with any certainty. Archaeological experimentation has revealed, however, that virtually every element of the *aspis*' sophisticated design and laborious construction served a practical, tactical purpose. I hope that this article has made a compelling case that the *telamon* and secondary *antilabe* were no exceptions.

Andrew Yamato is co-founder of the hoplite reenactment group* The Greek Phalanx. *He lives with his family in Brooklyn.

Elements of a Greek shield

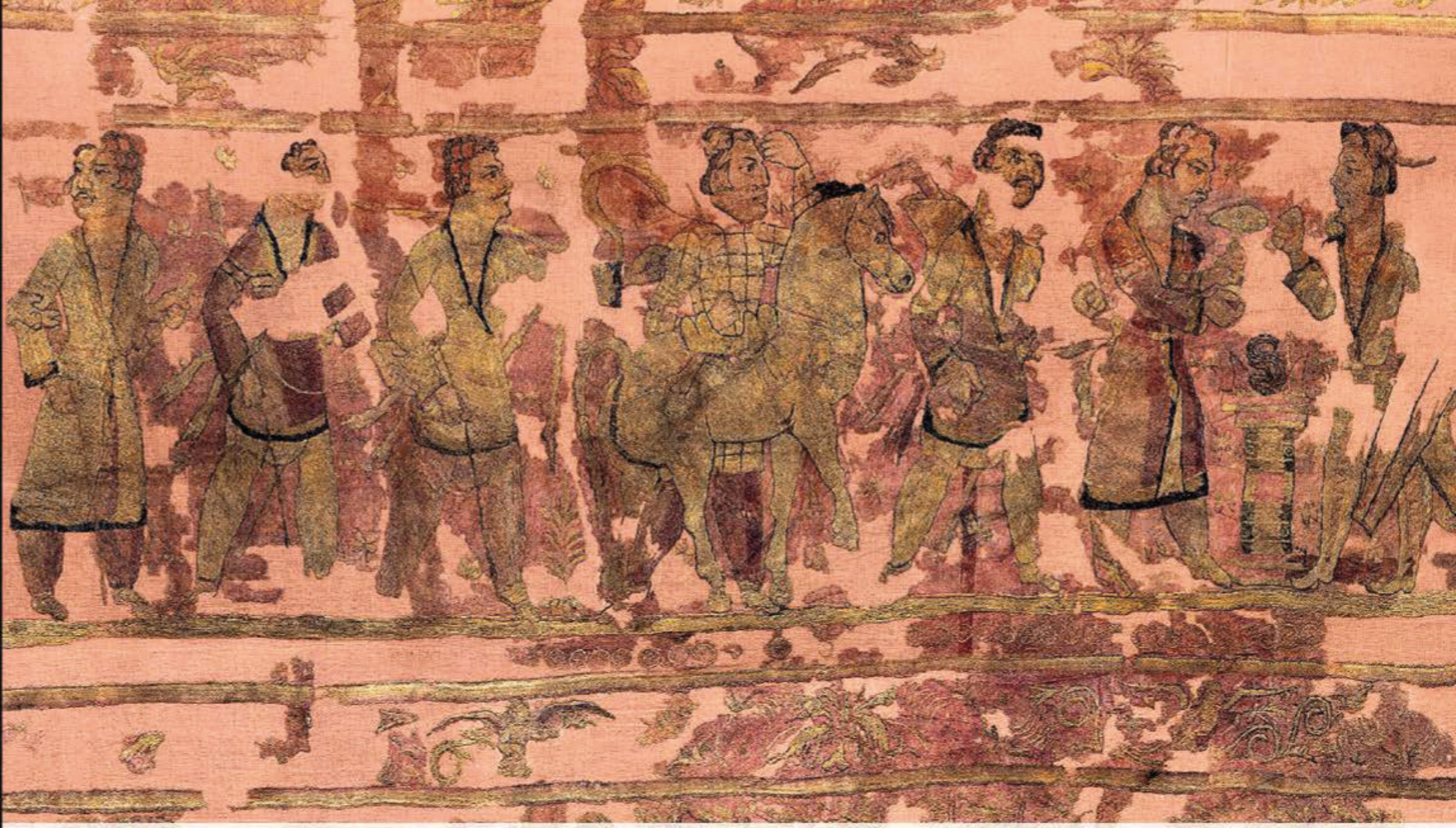
The heart of a Greek *aspis* (or "Argive shield") was its approximately one metre-diameter wooden core. This was made from butted planks or laminated slats of willow or poplar in the shape of a shallow bowl with a narrow offset rim. The interior could be leather-lined for comfort, with the exterior faced in linen, hide, or bronze for protection. The outside might be painted or have appliques attached.

The bearer wielded this unusually heavy shield (perhaps 12-18lbs) by thrusting his left arm through a central bronze band (the *porpax*) and gripping a braided handle near the rim (the *antilabe*). The shield's concave shape allowed the bearer to rest the rim on his shoulder while also serving (per Paul Bardunias in *Hoplites at War*) to protect his diaphragm in the otherwise suffocating press of shield-on-shield *othismos*.



A duel over a fallen warrior. The detailed inside of the shield has fittings for a *telamon*, but it is not fitted.

© George E. Koronaios / Wikimedia Commons



Detail of an embroidered carpet from the Noin-Ula burial site depicting various warriors, one on horseback. The Xiongnu dressed similarly.

ASSERTING HAN MILITARY DOMINANCE

GENERALS OF THE MARTIAL EMPEROR

By Clay Vagrant

By the second century BC, Chinese civilization was blooming under the empire of the Han Dynasty. With this era came various advances in science and technology, the arts, agriculture, and commerce. Some historians have even argued that the Han Dynasty allowed China to become “the most technologically innovative and advanced of all the classical civilizations.”

Han China expanded its borders, bringing independent states and kingdoms under permanent Chinese control through the deployment of a large, powerful military in aggressive campaigns. Ultimately, imperial expansion allowed the Han Dynasty to rule a domain larger in area than even that of the Roman Empire. For all the strength and prosperity the Han Dynasty achieved, however, the empire was not without its troubles. Yet the greatest threat of all came not from within the empire, but from beyond its borders.

Lead-glazed earthenware model of a watchtower, first – early third century AD. Such pottery models were included in Eastern Han burials.

© Metropolitan Museum of Art

A dynasty under threat

Chinese civilization had always been under constant attack by ‘barbarians’ in the northern territories. By the time of the Han Dynasty, a confederation of mounted nomadic warriors, occupying much of what is now Mongolia, posed an existential threat to the Chinese empire. They were called the Xiongnu and they had been unified by a new *shanyu* (‘chieftain’) named Modu.

The historian of the Han Dynasty, Sima Qian, wrote extensively about the Xiongnu in his *Historical Records*:

> *“their lands are divided into regions under the control of various leaders. They have no writing and promises and agreements are only verbal ... The little boys start out by learning to ride sheep and shoot birds and rats with a bow and arrow … Thus all the young men are able to use a bow and act as armed cavalry in time of war.”*

Modu, the Xiongnu chieftain, took advantage of the chaos within China in the years after

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the collapse of the Qin Dynasty to raid Han territory and expand Xiongnu control in the region (206 BC). These constant incursions into Chinese lands allowed them to reach the vicinity of the imperial capital twice.

A new emperor for a new status quo

Liu Bang, the founder of the Han Dynasty, ruled as Emperor Gaozu. After defeating the Qin Dynasty in battle, he campaigned to drive the Xiongnu from within China's borders. He ultimately failed, and when his forces were surrounded by enemy cavalry for one week at Mount Baideng, he barely escaped being captured. Instead, Gaozu resorted to a policy of pacification, sending annual tribute gifts of rice, silk, and liquor, and even a Han princess for diplomatic marriage to the Xiongnu.

Han Dynasty figure of a shield bearer now in the Henan Provincial Museum.

© Gary Todd / Flickr

The foreign policy of pacification continued for 60 years and had to be renewed time and again during the administrations of several weak emperors as raiding persisted. The Han Dynasty would not be able to initiate a real counteroffensive against the Xiongnu until the reign of Liu Che, who took the imperial throne at the age of sixteen in 156 BC. Later known as Emperor Wu ('martial emperor'), Liu Che reformed the military and effectively reversed the foreign policy of the Han Dynasty. In 133 BC, Emperor Wu finally took the initiative to reassert imperial power in the frontier regions through military campaigns in Central Asia.

Prophesied career

Arguably, two of the greatest names in the Han-Xiongnu War are Wei Qing and Huo Qubing, his nephew. Together with other generals, the duo dealt crippling blows to the mounted steppe warriors, largely neutralizing the threat they posed to the Han Empire.

Wei Qing was the son of a concubine of a marquis (*pinyin*) and the marquis' household clerk. As a servant to the marquis in his youth, Wei Qing visited a prison in the Palace of Sweet Springs and received a prophecy from a prisoner, saying that he would rise to greatness and achieve the rank of marquis himself. He laughed off such a claim, but he would quickly ascend the imperial hierarchy. His rapid ascent to prominence began in 139 BC, when his elder sister, Wei Zifu, won Emperor Wu's favor and became pregnant, much to the chagrin of Wu's very jealous consort, the childless Empress Chen. In her envy, she had Wei Qing arrested and prepared for his execution until a good friend, Gongsun Ao, a palace horseman, conducted a rescue operation and extracted him to safety. Emperor Wu heard what happened and immediately summoned Wei Qing to promote him to superintendent of the guards at Jianzhang Palace. Soon, Wei Qing advanced to the rank of palace counsellor, and by 129 BC, he was promoted to 'general of carriage and cavalry'.

Wei Qing proved to be an effective military commander after dealing decisive blows against the Xiongnu, reportedly killing or capturing as many

A Xiongnu leather robe, Henan Provincial Museum, Zhengzhou. Such garments may have been the armour of the horse-borne Xiongnu raiders.

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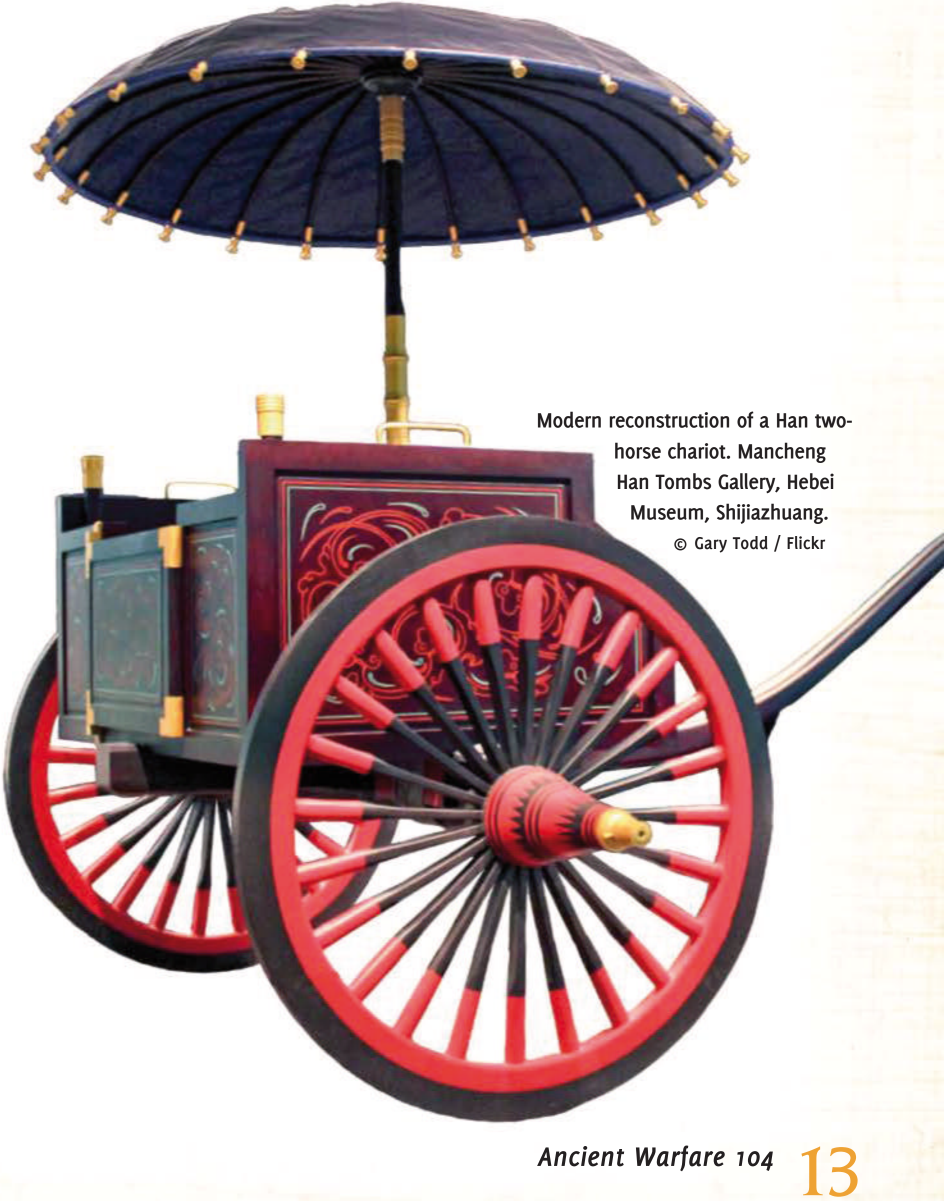


Modern reconstruction of a Han two-horse chariot. Mancheng Han Tombs Gallery, Hebei Museum, Shijiazhuang.

© Gary Todd / Flickr

A short sword (*duan jian*) from Xinjiang, Eastern Central Asia, fourth-first century BC. - It is both a weapon and a status symbol.

© Metropolitan Museum of Art

(*Top*) Remains of Hecang fortress, one of the Han Dynasty structures at Yumen Pass, Gansu Province, China.
© Guan / Wikimedia Commons

(*Bottom*) Reconstruction of the Xiongnu fortified city at the Ivolga Archaeological site, Selenga Highlands, near Ulan-Ude, Russia.
© KoizumiBS / Wikimedia Commons

as several thousand within the first year of his military career. Wei Qing made sure to find retribution for any further Xiongnu incursions and raids made into Han territory — raids that resulted in the death or capture of Chinese officials and many civilians. In one such counterattack, in 127 BC, when the Xiongnu penetrated the border and killed the Chinese governor of Liaoxi, they captured 2000 inhabitants and defeated General Han Anguo. General Wei Qing answered in kind, invading south from the Yellow River's bend, capturing several thousand Xiongnu, along with their baggage and with tens of thousands of their livestock, causing the kings of two tribes to flee. As a result of these decisive victories in the Han-Xiongnu War, Wei Qing was raised to the office of Marquis of Changping, governing 3800 households — confirming the truth of the prophecy given to him years earlier.

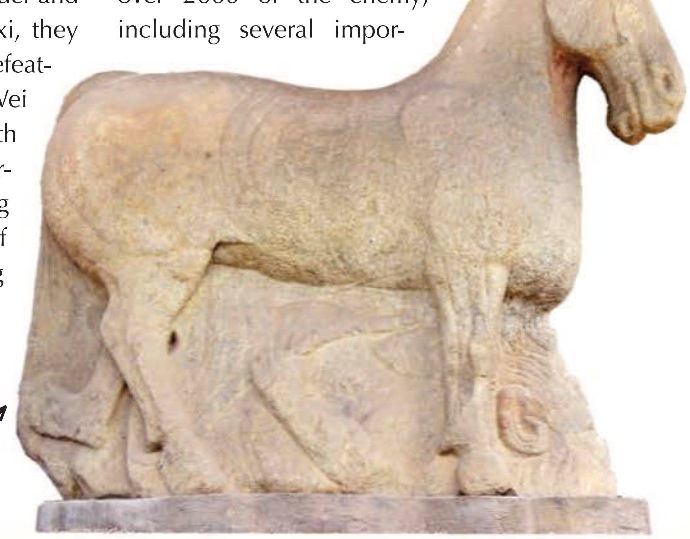
Gilt bronze Xiongnu chariot axle hub in the National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaan Bataar, Mongolia.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

In 124 BC, General Wei Qing took 100,000 men and six generals deep into Xiongnu territory, capturing ten more petty chiefs and putting the Xiongnu's 'Wise King of the Right' to flight. In the course of the operation 15,000 people and several hundred thousand livestock were captured. Consequently, Wei Qing was soon promoted by the emperor himself and granted the title of general in chief, granting him command of all the troops of the other generals. His sons became noblemen, while his own fiefdom was increased to 6000 households. Siam Qian tells us that Wei Qing earned the highest distinctions but was nonetheless known to be considerate of his men and compliant with imperial authority. Sima Qian claims this was to curry favour with the emperor, although these characteristics earned him no special favours.

Daring nephew

Wei Qing's grand military accomplishments and significant victories against the Xiongnu would be overshadowed by the meteoric rise of his nephew, Huo Qubing. As an attendant aged eighteen, Huo Qubing gained favor from the emperor and was already known for his skills in riding and shooting. Under imperial orders, Wei Qing put the teenager in command of his own force of young soldiers and was given the title of 'swift commander'. Bold, daring, ambitious, and eager to bring the fight to the Xiongnu, Huo Qubing led his troops to victory.

According to Sima Qian, the emperor's edict recorded that Huo Qubing killed and captured over 2000 of the enemy, including several impor-



Sculpture of a horse trampling a Xiongnu warrior from the tomb of general Huo Qubing, who fought in the Han-Xiongnu War.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

An Eastern Han bronze one-horse chariot model – note the differing number of wheel spokes.

© Gary Todd / Flickr

tant figures, along with some of the Xiongnu *shanyu*'s relatives. Because of these early accomplishments, in 124–123 BC, Huo Qubing received lands with 1600 households and earned the title of the 'Highest in the Army'-marquis. Three years later, he was appointed 'general of the swift cavalry', for which he would be best known, and with a force of 10,000 mounted warriors was deployed for campaigns against the Xiongnu.

Western Han painted archer figurine, second century BC.

© Mary Harrsch / Wikimedia Commons

These campaigns resulted in grievous blows against the Xiongnu. Huo's army rode more than 500 km in six days, fighting the whole way. Ultimately, his operation led to the defeat of 8000 of the enemy and the complete destruction of the fighting forces of a barbarian king, Lu, whom he slew, together with the ruler of Lan. The son of the Hunye king was also captured together with the ministers and chief commandants.

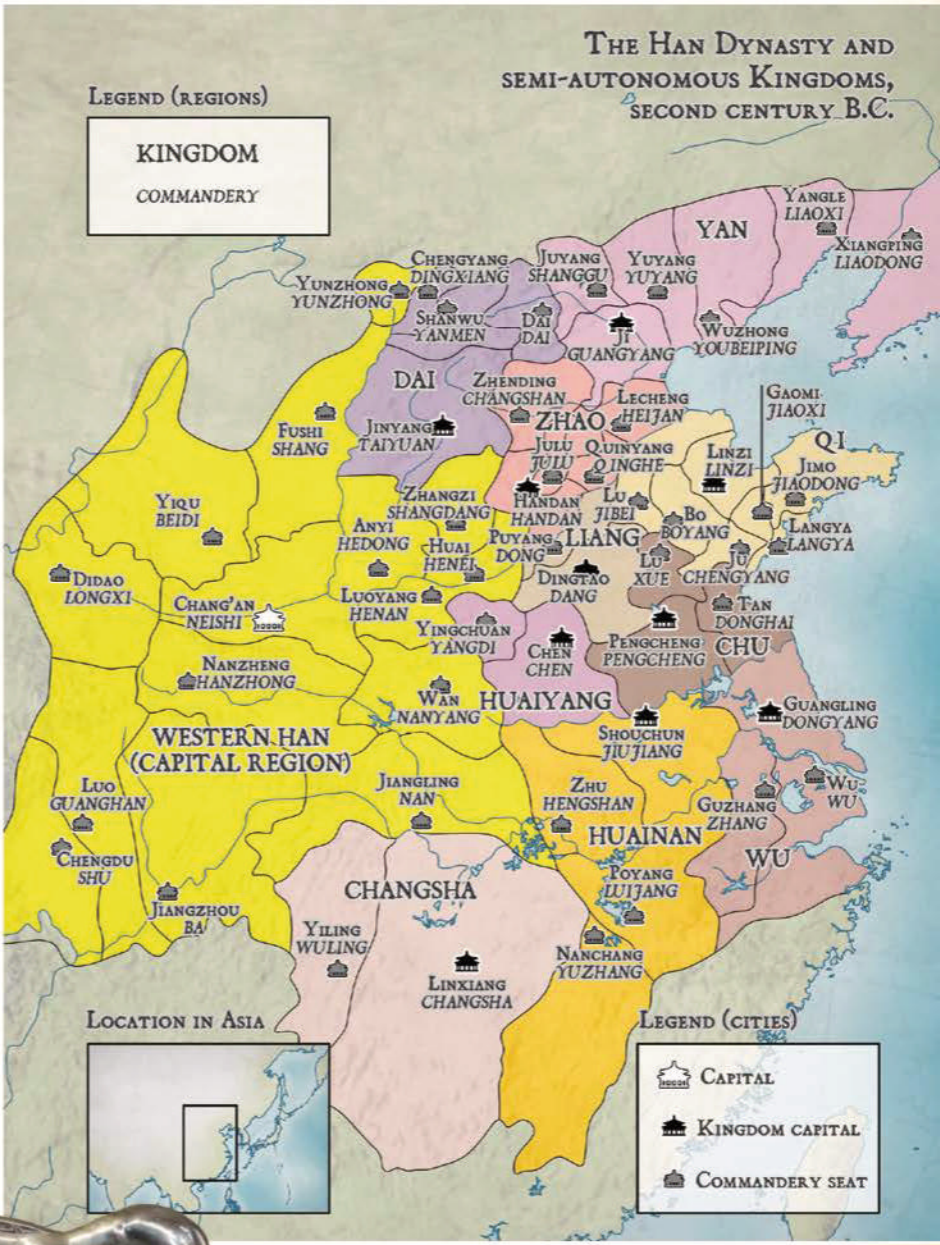
Huo Qubing continued to win victory after victory and gained great favour from Emperor Wu. His escapades resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Xiongnu and the capture of several kings and their ministers and officers, all while taking very few casualties of his own. He was best known for leaving behind the main force and boldly riding deep into enemy territory with hand-selected troops. His fierce advances even resulted in the surrender of the Hunye king and up to 40,000 of his people, including 32 rulers, after 8000 of the king's men had been slain. This victory led to the conquest and control of the great Hexi Corridor — the Silk Road's vital gateway into the Han Empire. Because of his continuing success, Huo Qubing gained ever more imperial favour until it matched that of his uncle, the general-in-chief, Wei Qing.

Battle of Mobei

Despite the significant victories brought by Wei Qing and Huo Qubing, the Xiongnu continued to raid Han territory. Thus, in 119 BC, Emperor Wu began to plot a major strategic offensive directly into the heart of Xiongnu territory. Wei Qing and Huo Qubing were each given 50,000 cavalry along with armoured baggage trains and infantry numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Wei Qing rode out of Dingxiang, while Huo Qubing rode out of Dai province. Together with their subordinate generals, they manoeuvred to take down the head of the Xiongnu — the *shanyu* himself. The Xiongnu advisor, Zhao Xin, who originally convinced the *shanyu* that the Han would never dare to cross the desert, also assured him that by the time the Han did cross the dry lands, they would be far too worn down to engage in battle. The *shanyu*, therefore, decided to move his forces further north to the edge of the Gobi desert in what is now Mongolia.

Map of the Han Dynasty in the second century BC showing the various kingdoms, important cities and military command centres.

© Richard Thomson


The Han Dynasty and Semi-autonomous Kingdoms, second century B.C.
Legend (regions)
KINGDOM
COMMANDERY
YAN
Yangle
LIAOXI
Xiangping
LIAODONG
Chengyang
DINGXIANG
Juyang
SHANGGU
Yuyang
YUYANG
Yunzhong
YUNZHONG
Shanwu
YANMEN
Dai
DAI
Ji
GUANGYANG
Wuzhong
YOUBEIPING
DAI
Zhending
CHANGSHAN
ZHAO
Lecheng
HEIJAN
Gaomi
JIAOXI
QI
Fushi
SHANG
Jinyang
TAIYUAN
Julu
JULU
Quinyang
QINGHE
Linzi
LINZI
Jimo
JIAODONG
Yiqu
BEIDI
Zhangzi
SHANGDANG
Handan
HANDAN
Lu
JIBEI
Bo
BOYANG
Langya
LANGYA
Anyi
HEDONG
Huai
HENEI
Puyang
DONG
LIANG
Lu
XUE
Ju
CHENGYANG
Didao
LONGXI
Dingtao
DANG
Chang'an
NEISHI
Luoyang
HENAN
Tan
DONGHAI
Yingchuan
YANGDI
Chen
CHEN
Pengcheng
PENGCHENG
CHU
Nanzheng
HANZHONG
Wan
NANYANG
HUAIYANG
Guangling
DONGYANG
WESTERN HAN (CAPITAL REGION)
Shouchun
JIUJIANG
Luo
GUANGHAN
Jiangling
NAN
Zhu
HENGSHAN
Wu
WU
Guzhang
ZHANG
HUAINAN
WU
Chengdu
SHU
CHANGSHA
Poyang
LUIJANG
Jiangzhou
BA
Yiling
WULING
Nanchang
YUZHANG
Linxiang
CHANGSHA
Location in Asia
Legend (cities)
Capital
Kingdom capital
Commandery seat

Silver plaque in the shape of a horse or mule from China, 400–200 BC.

© Daderot / Wikimedia Commons

Two details from the same Han-era brick, showing battles between the nomadic Hu people and Han forces. Note how on both sections crossbows are being reloaded.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

Wei Qing and his army rode over 500 km through the desert to descend on the *shanyu*'s position. He then chose to pitch camp instead of attacking in full force and arranged his armoured supply wagons in a defensive circle around the camp. He ordered 5000 of his cavalry to attack the Xiongnu who, in turn, deployed 10,000 of their own men to meet them. Meanwhile, a sandstorm engulfed the battlefield, causing confusion and mayhem as the two opposing forces were blinded by swirling sand and became disrupted. The Han forces attempted to flank the *shanyu*, but the Xiongnu leader, realizing that the battle could not be won, managed to sneak past their encirclement and escape northwest with several hundred of his men.

The intense fighting continued into the night with both sides suffering equal numbers of dead or wounded. The *shanyu's* escape was discovered, and the Han attempted a pursuit while the Xiongnu scattered, defeated, before dawn came. Though Wei Qing was unsuccessful in capturing the *shanyu*, he managed to kill and capture 10,000 of the enemy. Han forces cut down a total of 19,000 enemy forces during their pursuit.

Meanwhile, Huo Qubing's initiative and boldness allowed him to kill and capture so many of the enemy that he earned even greater distinction than his uncle. Like in previous operations, he captured several kings, scores of generals, and many more officials and ministers. The total captives he seized numbered 70,443, while losing 'only' 30 per cent of his own men. The food seized from the enemy provided his men with plentiful provisions and allowed them to penetrate ever deeper into enemy territory, conduct rituals

General Li Guangli and the War for Heavenly Horses

The imperial Chinese envoy and explorer, Zhang Qian, was commissioned by Emperor Wu in 139 BC to explore the lands to the west, to document trade routes of the Silk Road, and find potential allies against the Xiongnu. He spent ten years in captivity under the Xiongnu, however, before escaping and making his way back in 126 BC, when he received the title of *Bowang* marquis. He then served as a commander under Wei Qing, and together with Huo Qubing, participated in their offensives against the Xiongnu before attempting a second exploratory journey in 115 BC. He discovered India, Parthia, and had a direct encounter with the Hellenistic culture of Alexandria Eschate, located in Ferghana Valley in what is now Uzbekistan, which he called Da Yuan or 'Great Ionians'.

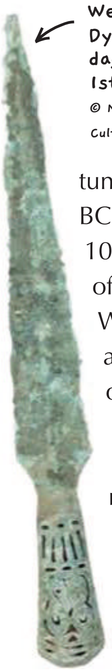
The people of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom were descendants of Greeks who had been settled in the region by Alexander the Great some 200 years earlier. Among Zhang Qian's observations of the urbanized people were that their horses were of outstanding quality. Given the importance of cavalry in the careers of Wei Quing and Huo Qubing, such an appreciation can be well understood. Their acquisition would be crucial in the campaigns against the Xiongnu and would fix the Han Dynasty's recurring problem of horse shortages, although the emperor also believed that having the creatures would signify Heaven's blessing upon him.

After reports of his findings reached the imperial court, Emperor Wu demanded that the Da Yuan pay him tribute with the horses. The Da Yuan king, however, refused, and thus

Western Han Dynasty iron armor unearthed in the tomb of the King of Chu at Lion Mountain, Jiangsu Province, China.
© 白色瑰宝 / Wikimedia Commons

in the mountains to commemorate the Han imperial victory, and then conduct a pursuit against a Xiongnu band as far as Lake Baikal in what is now Siberia.

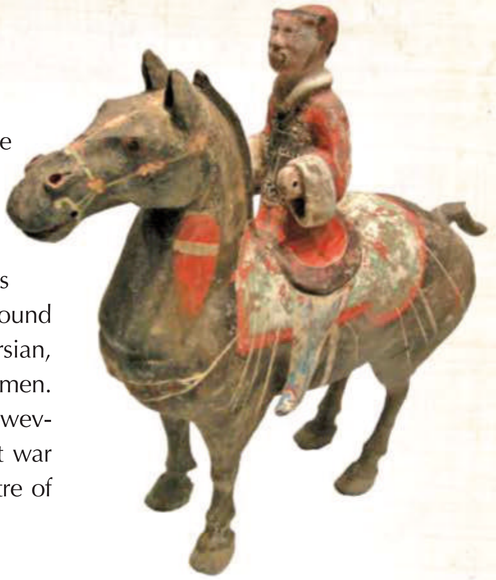
Eventually, Huo Qubing's reputation eclipsed that of his uncle, to the point where Wei Qing's own friends abandoned him to join the younger commander in the hope of earning prestigious positions. Wei Qing faded into the background, allowing the spotlight to focus on his nephew. Unfortunately, Huo Qubing passed away in 117 BC, aged only 23; Wei Qing died later, in 105 BC. Their exploits had turned the tide of the war against the Xiongnu. All in all, Wei Qing and Huo Qubing "took their cavalry further west, [and] overthrew five subordinate Xiongnu kingdoms in two great converging sweeps". Because of such offensives, there was no record of Xiongnu raids in Han territory for eighteen years.

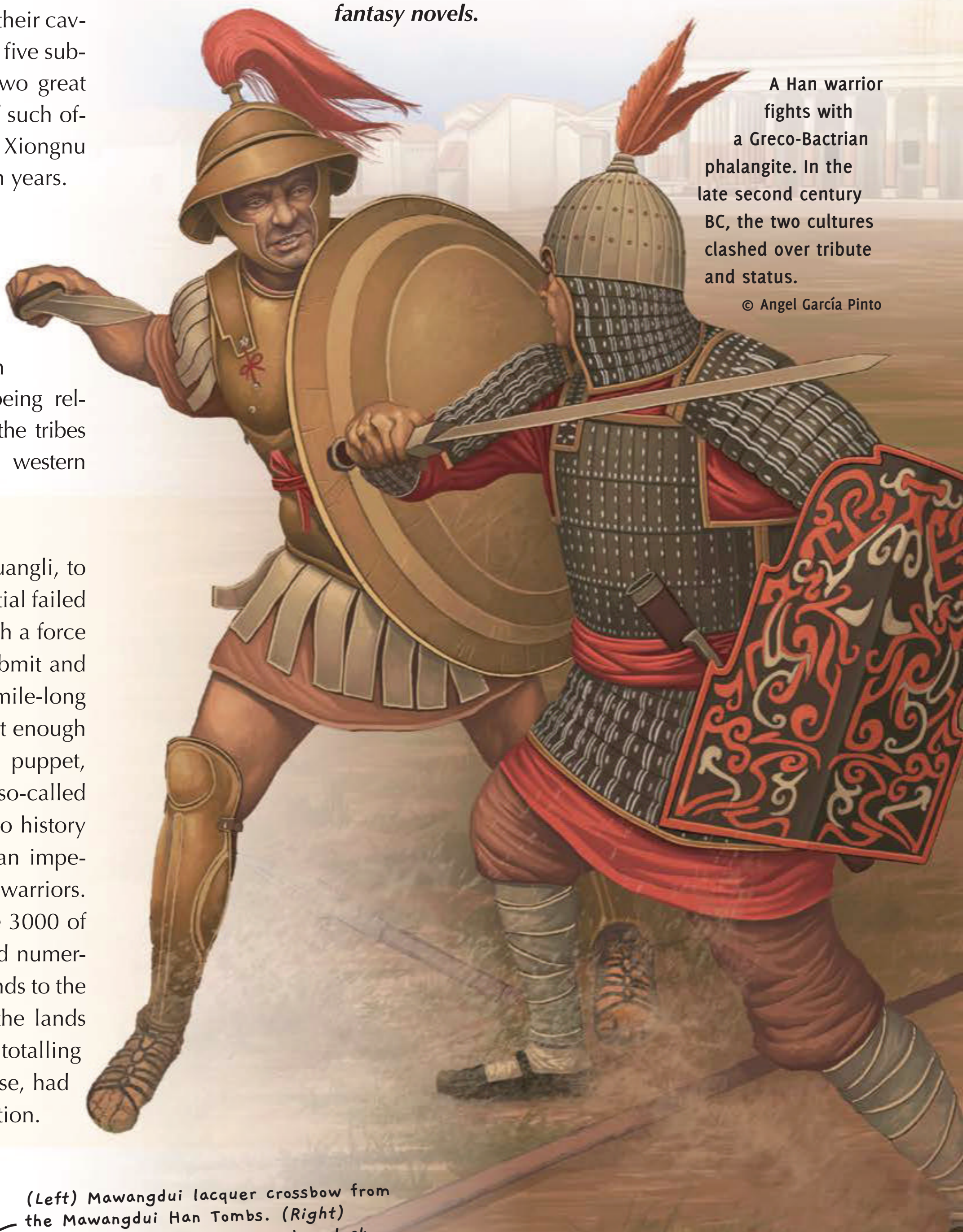

Western Han Dynasty bronze dagger, 3rd – 1st century BC.
© National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, Japan

Conclusion

By 55 BC, Xiongnu power began to decline when the confederation dismantled into five competing groups. "The Southern Xiongnu eventually consented to being relegated to tributary status similar to the tribes and states in China's southern and western borders." Princes from vassal states like the Southern Xiongnu were sent to China as hostages and received Chinese education. In exchange, the Chinese sent large, expensive gifts such has colossal quantities of silk rolls and silk floss. Such silks were found as far as Rome, having passed through Persian, Indian, and Sogdian merchant middlemen. This arrangement with the tributaries, however, helped ensure the peace and prevent war while positioning Han China as the centre of the civilized world.

Clay Vagrant is an independent scholar and lover of world history. He received his ALM in history from Harvard University in 2024. He also writes historical fantasy novels.


A Han Dynasty painted ceramic figurine of an armoured cavalryman on his mount.
© Sailko / Wikimedia Commons


A Han warrior fights with a Greco-Bactrian phalangite. In the late second century BC, the two cultures clashed over tribute and status.
© Angel García Pinto

Emperor Wu sent his general, Li Guangli, to take the horses by force. After an initial failed expedition, General Li Guangli, with a force of 60,000 men, forced towns to submit and provide supplies along the 1000-mile-long route. He reached Da Yuan with just enough men to behead its king, install a puppet, and bring the city to its knees. This so-called War for Heavenly Horses brought to history a collision of worlds where the Han imperial forces clashed with Hellenistic warriors. General Li managed to bring home 3000 of the heavenly horses and established numerous army garrisons all over those lands to the west. As a result, by 101 BC, all the lands stretching all the way to Ferghana, totalling the known world to the Han Chinese, had been brought into imperial subjugation.

(Left) Mawangdui lacquer crossbow from the Mawangdui Han Tombs. (Right) Han-dynasty era bronze crossbow lock from the Henan Provincial Museum.
© Both: Gary Todd / Flickr

GREAT THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

By Murray Dahm

THE 'LITTLE' LUDOVISI SARCOPHAGUS

We saw the Great Ludovisi Sarcophagus back in *AW* 16.4. It's smaller brother (hence 'little', 'small' or *piccolo*) is, however, just as interesting and is in fact older — dating to ca. AD 170-180. This 'small' sarcophagus is well worth an independent examination rather than simply as the smaller of two sarcophagi once owned by Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi.

This marble sarcophagus is also carved in deep relief and depicts a battle between Romans and Barbarians; in this case, Roman cavalry ride down and defeat enemy cavalry and, on each corner, we find a winged victory with a bound barbarian beneath. The Romans are all shown in muscled cuirasses and with a variety of helmet styles (including a ringed example on the central Roman figure). They were originally armed with both swords and spears. The barbarians are mostly unhorsed and all shown naked although on the low-relief side panels especially there are accurate, geometrically varied shields and three figures carry curved *sica* blades. These were the curved weapons typical of the Dacians, many of which have been found in the archaeological record. Most of the barbarians have their hair loose and are unshaven, but beards are depicted too and one bearded figure wears a 'Phrygian' cap. These, perhaps, give us clues to identify the scene. The most helpful aspect of the scene, however, is that the sculptural style seems to match that depicted on the Column of Marcus Aurelius. There, too, we find ringed helmets and other details in common. This sarcophagus seems to predate the column, construction of which was possibly only begun in AD 180. As such, the sarcophagus may be one of the earliest surviving sculptural records of Marcus' wars and it may even have been produced while the wars were still ongoing. Our sources for those wars are very fragmentary, but there were campaigns against the Dacians as well as the Marcomanni during that period. The predominance of cavalry in the sarcophagus reinforces the image we get from Ovid and Dio Chrysostom (though not from sources such as both Imperial columns) that the Dacians may have fielded large numbers of mounted troops. The cavalry may also suggest action against the Sarmatians who certainly did have large numbers of cavalry and who Marcus defeated in the battle on the ice, possibly in AD 174 (the chronology of the campaigns is uncertain — see *AW* VII.6).

Bronze cavalry shield boss decorated with the head of a Medusa that dates to the second century AD.

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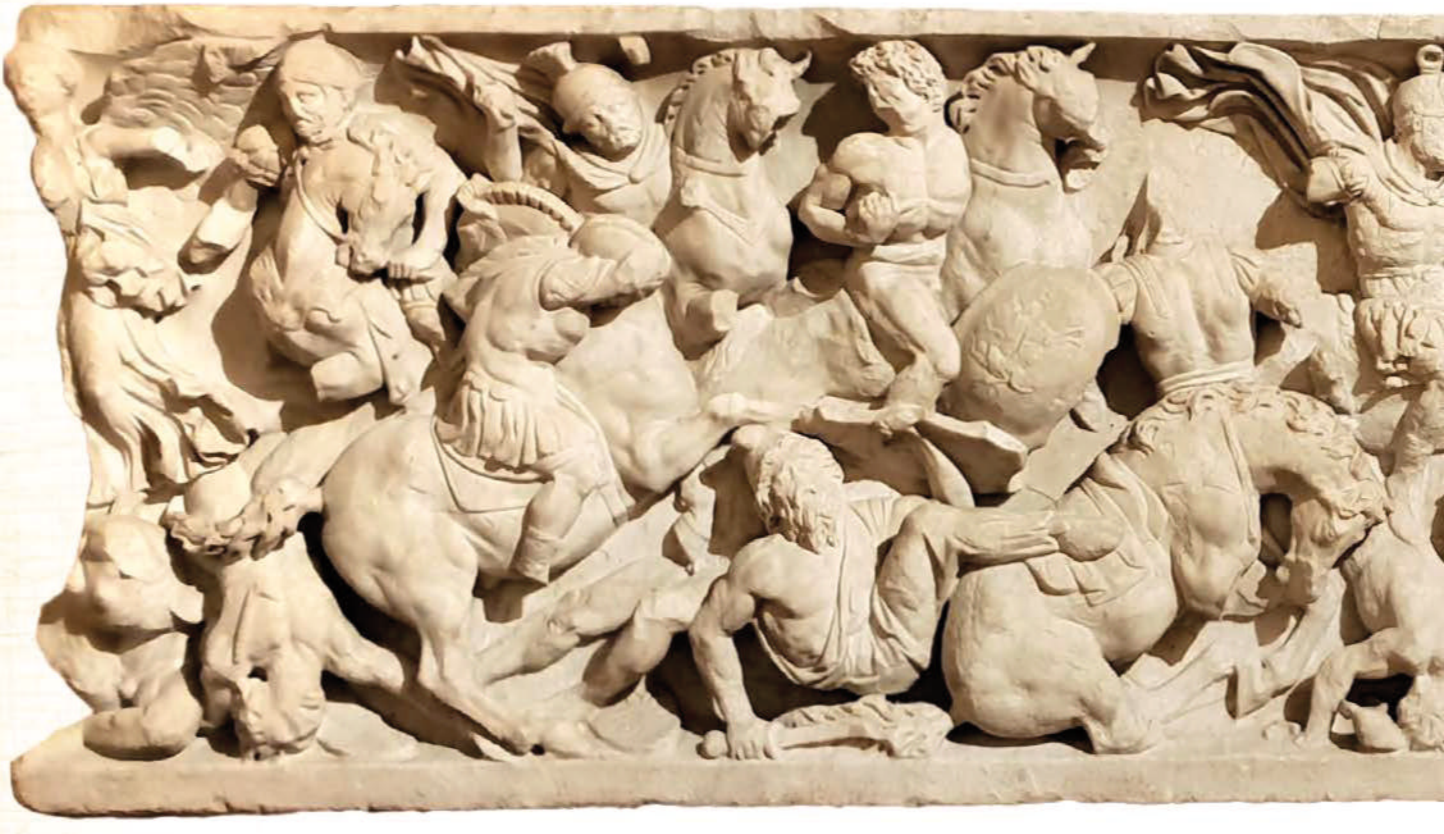

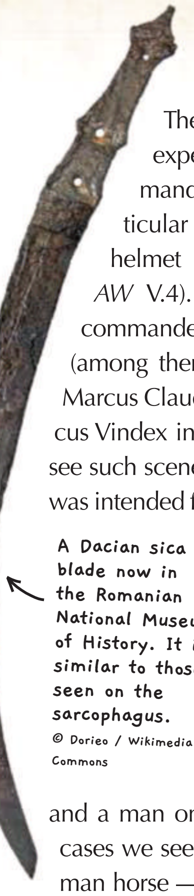

A Dacian *sica* blade now in the Romanian National Museum of History. It is similar to those seen on the sarcophagus.
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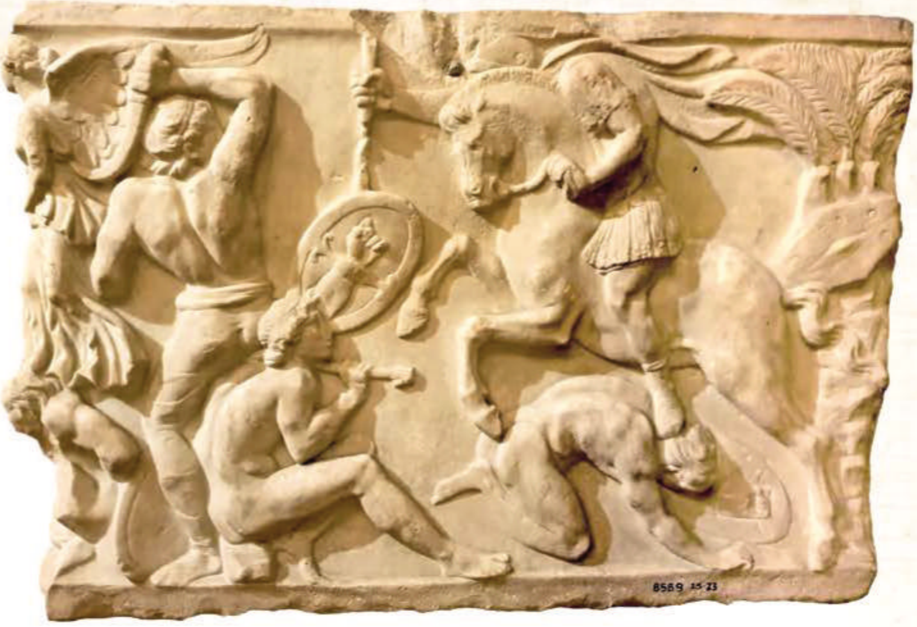

The central image is, as we would expect, of a victorious Roman commander. There seems nothing in particular to identify him and the ringed helmet is somewhat problematic (see *AW* V.4). However, several of Marcus' commanders fell in combat during the wars (among them Furius Victorinus in AD 168, Marcus Claudius Fronto in AD 170, and Marcus Vindex in 171/2) so it is not surprising to see such scenes and, perhaps this sarcophagus was intended for such an individual. There is no sign of Roman defeat, however; the enemy are nearly all defeated and unhorsed. On one of the side panels we see a single Roman horseman battling with three infantry figures; on the other, against a cavalryman and a man on foot at the same time. In both cases we see a trampled figure under the Roman horse — familiar iconography of Roman victory over barbarians. The (geographically out of place) palm trees in these scenes probably also indicate victory. Two of the individuals on the side panels wear trousers. Combined with the *sica* blades and the different hair styles and shield designs, this sarcophagus seems to give us more accurate details of the Rome's enemies than usual. There is even a quiver hanging from a tree (again we are told by Ovid and Dio Chrysostom that the Dacians relied on archery — a picture backed up by archaeology). On the Romans too we see a variety of weapons and helmet types. There are also clearly artistic traits in play — the naked barbarians without a trace of armour and even the all-muscled cuirass Roman cavalry. The side panels seem to suggest that the barbarians in the sources always outnumbered the Romans, while the front panel has seven Roman figures and seven barbarians.

The interior of the sarcophagus includes a sculpted cushion for the deceased, and a drain hole tells us it was later reused as a fountain. The 'little' Ludovisi Sarcophagus is on display in the Museo Altemps, Rome.

***Murray Dahm is assistant editor of* Ancient Warfare.**

One of the side panels shows a Roman cavalryman fighting with three enemies. Note the *sica* blade, shields and trousers.
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The 'small' Ludovisi sarcophagus is incredibly rich in detail. The main scene shows Roman and barbarian cavalry fighting it out.
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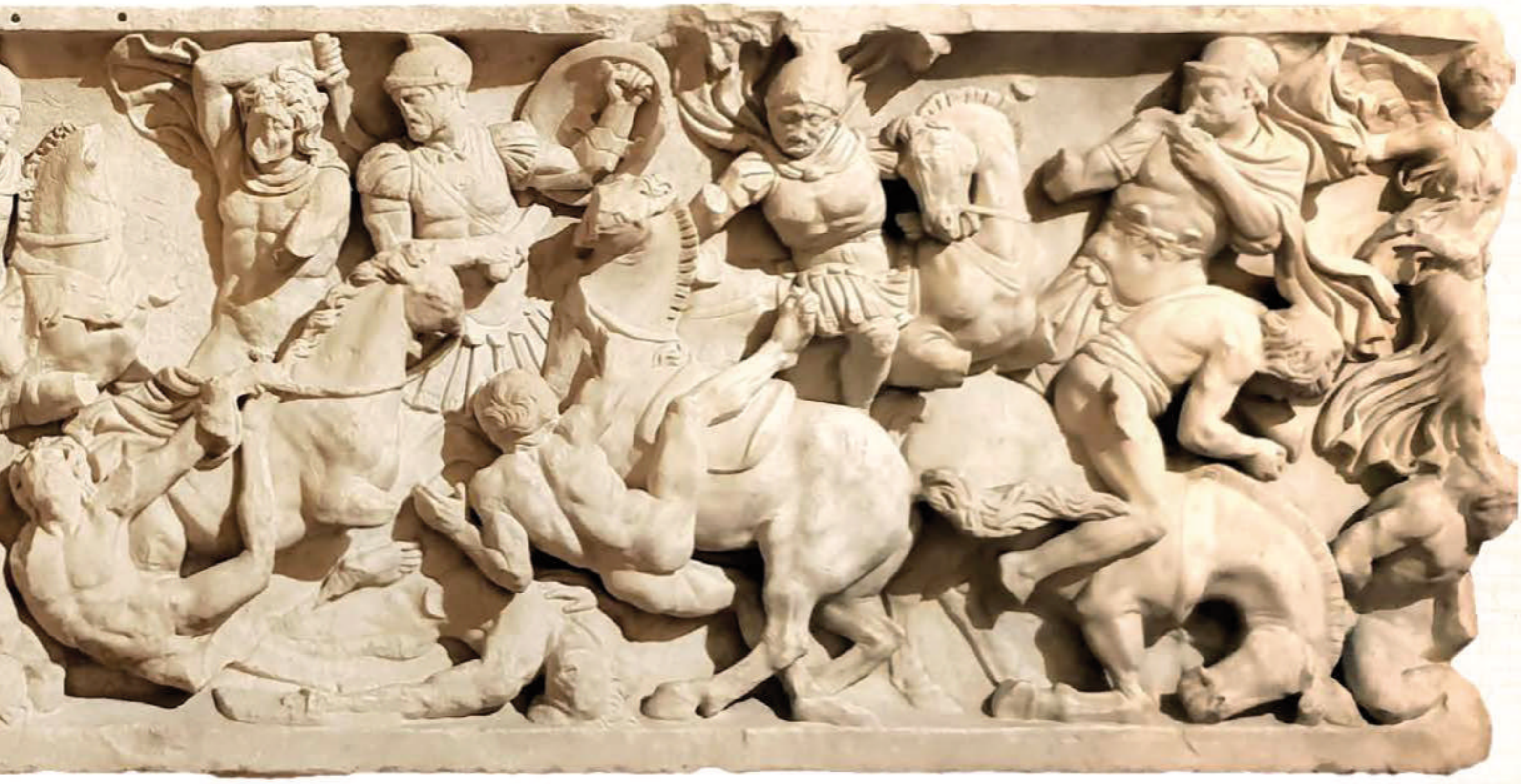
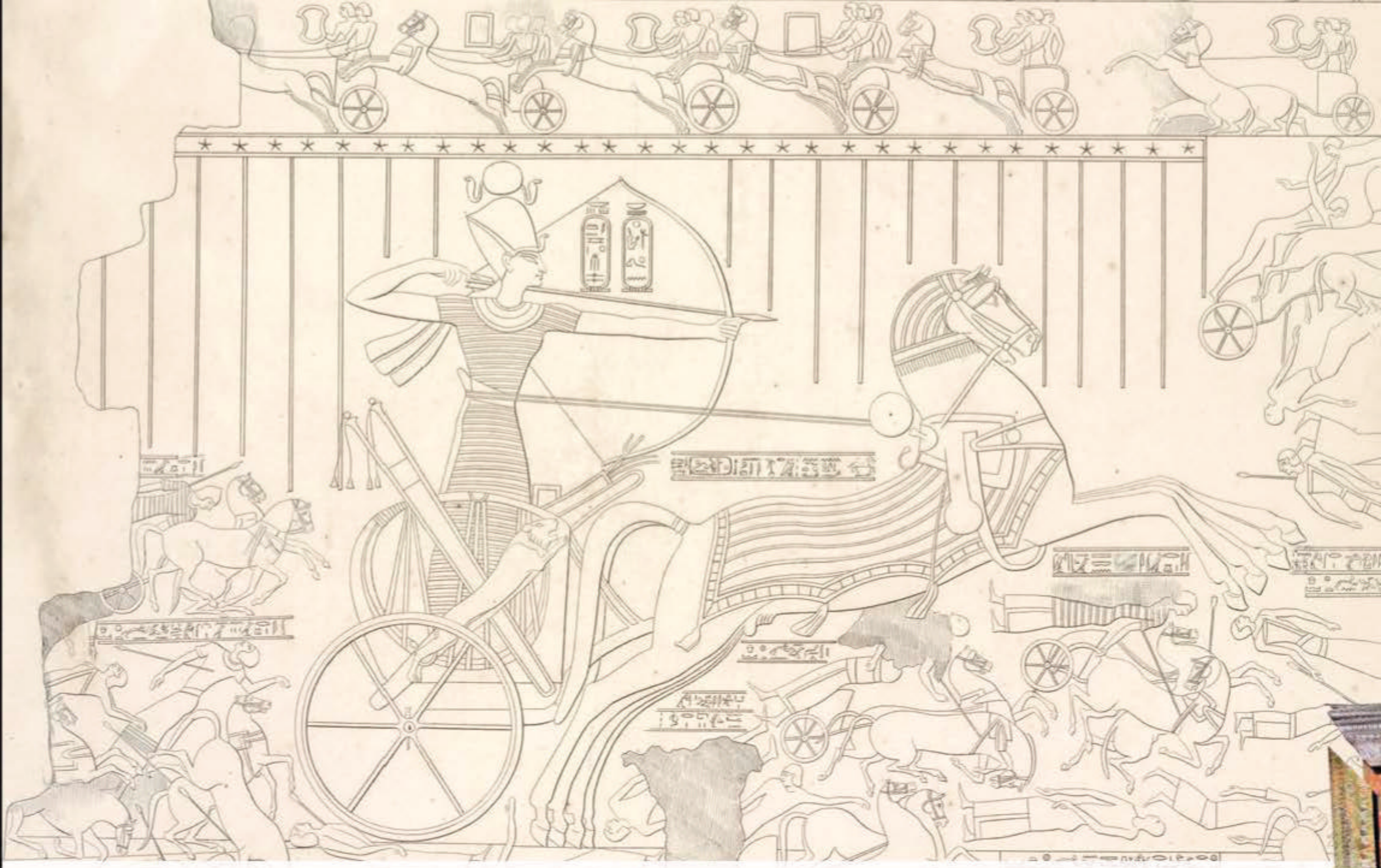




Ramses III, mounted in his chariot, charges ahead of his own troops and runs down his enemies: perception was important to ancient leaders.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

By Jasper Oorthuys

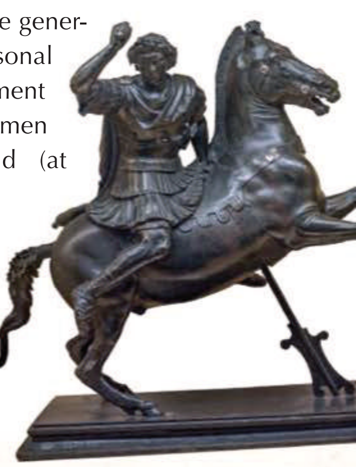
WHO PUT YOU IN CHARGE?

The dangers and risks of warfare were well understood in the ancient world. *Vae Victis* (woe to the conquered) indeed, as Livy has Brennus tell to the Romans (5.48.9). Wars might turn against you, bringing destruction, hunger, slavery, and death. One of the ways such dangers might be mitigated, and hopefully inflicted upon the enemy, was by appointing the right leader.

The right man for the job — except in a very few famous examples were a woman led the army — was generally qualified by virtue of birth. In any monarchy, the king was the obvious war-leader. It was a requirement of his position that he defend his kingdom. Moreover, in early societies the king was often the conduit for divine favour, and denying that favour to the army by his absence on the battlefield was obviously anathema to success. Only later did kings appoint generals to fight their campaigns. Still, strict control and oversight remained necessary. The history of the Roman Empire is, after all, replete with examples of armies who preferred to see their own general on the throne rather than an emperor who did nothing to ensure their well-being and battlefield success.

In polities without a king, prominent members of society — in effect politicians — might be appointed or elected to lead an army. In all such cases, however, their remit was carefully limited by time, region, or by splitting the command over multiple individuals. It would not do to give one man the ability to establish himself as sole ruler, nor create a situation where generals would prioritise personal glory and advancement over the welfare of the men under their command (at least in theory).

Second-century AD bust of Xenophon. The Greek general, elected by his troops after the murder of their appointed officers, elaborated on the qualities of a general in many of his works.
© Carole Raddato / Wikimedia Commons



Alexander the Great on Bucephalus is shown in full swing on this Roman copy of a Greek original from Herculaneum.
© Dan Diffendale / Flickr

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How to be a general

A good general needed to know when to commit his force to battle, and when to avoid a fight. But as Socrates discovered when talking to a well-educated young man running for office, what was taught about these matters, was quite limited: "But this [tactics] is the smallest part of the art of generalship. For a general must be ready to provide military gear and arrange supplies for his troops and he must be resourceful, hardworking, and vigilant, and also be taught and shrewd. What is more, he must be benevolent and harsh, frank and dissimulating, cautious, but also ready to plunder another's property, generous and rapacious. Indeed, he must be bountiful and greedy, sound in defence and aggressive in attack The man who is set to become a good general must also have many other qualities, both naturally or acquired by training. But of course tactical skill is a fine thing" (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.1.5-6).

Bronze inscription chronicling the career of Lucius Cornelius Piso, a legionary legate and consul.
© Rabax63 / Wikimedia Commons

A formal education for officers and generals never did appear during antiquity, but many authors, both with and without military experience, turned their hand to collections of 'tips and tricks', sayings attributed to famous commanders, and general advice on how to succeed in warfare (see also "Reading your way to victory" elsewhere in this issue). Using these military treatises, ancient generals might compensate for a lack of experience (or, god forbid, lack of talent): "It is stupid people who attribute setbacks to Fortune alone rather than to the carelessness of generals, and who attribute success to her rather than to the skill of commanders." (Onasander, *The General*, preface 6)

On the battlefield

Pharaoh Ramses II covered the walls of his mortuary temple with scenes that showed him rallying the troops and leading charges against the Hittite divisions at Kadesh. Displaying personal valour in the front line was equally of utmost importance to Homeric heroes and archaic Greek aristocrats alike. Greek hoplite generals, whether chosen or born to the role, posted themselves at the very right of the front rank, in the position of honour (though see Yamato in this issue for another interpretation).

As long as armies had little or no reserves to bring to bear, it might be reasonable to expect a general to encourage his troops in the front ranks. Once the entire line was engaged, Alexander the Great or his Successors might join with their elite cavalry at the (hopefully) crucial point and decide the battle. This hands-on approach was not without risk however. While it might be tempting for a general to take an active role in deciding the outcome of a battle, the stakes were dreadfully high: a commander injured or killed during combat could be catastrophic. Arrian provides us with an anecdote concerning Alexander, who became annoyed when this inconvenient truth was pointed out. He knew the front lines were not for him, but still couldn't help himself.

It was perhaps only in the third century BC, with the appearance of the Roman manipular army and its built-in reserves, or the Carthaginian army under Hannibal, that commanders stood behind the line, able to respond to an emergency or exploit an opportunity. Philopoemen, a contemporary of Hannibal, "did not think that it was right for a good general to lead the phalanx. Instead by riding round, now among the front ranks, now among the rear, and often in the middle, he oversaw everyone and corrected any faults" (Polyaenus, *Stratagemata* 6.4.1).

Going forward, generals would mostly stay out of the fray, only picking up a shield and standing shoulder to shoulder with their soldiers if an utmost effort was required to turn the tide of battle. Exceptions applied... AW

***Jasper Oorthuys is the editor of* Ancient Warfare.**

Achilles and Memnon are shown duelling on this Attic amphora. It's easy to forget that the Trojan heroes were all in charge of their own contingents. Achilles, for his part, brought the famous Myrmidos.
© Metropolitan Museum of Art

The strong relationship between the Roman emperor and his troops was constantly affirmed by way of imagery on coinage, as shown in this relief where soldiers bring captives before the emperor Marcus Aurelius.
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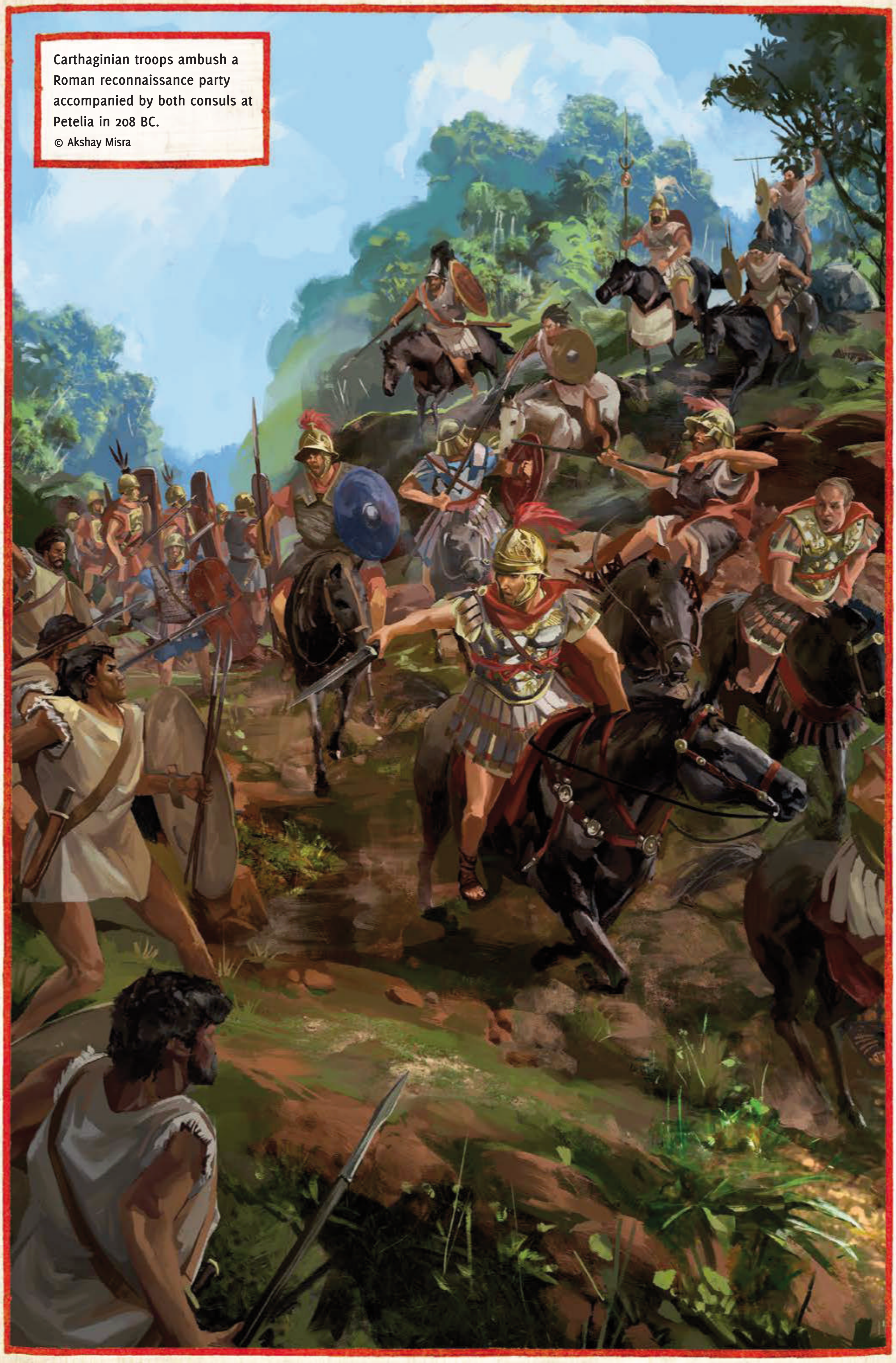

Carthaginian troops ambush a Roman reconnaissance party accompanied by both consuls at Petelia in 208 BC.

© Akshay Misra

REPUBLICAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP

By Ross Ballard

THE BURDEN OF COMMAND

By examining the role of commanders in one extensive and well-documented conflict of the Roman Republican era, the Second Punic War (218-201 BC), we can develop an outline of a legion's command structure, one that simultaneously illustrates the complexities and informal connections that informed military leadership in the mid-Republic.

Historiographic accounts of the Roman Republic are, at their core, histories of the Roman elite. Written by aristocratic authors for an aristocratic audience, Roman Republican historiography is dominated by the personal or collective deeds of the Roman nobility. In most cases these elite-driven narratives pose a challenge for historians attempting to form a holistic understanding of Roman society. However, as military command in Rome was the sole prerogative of the elite, when addressing the nature of Republican military leadership these literary accounts provide a wealth of information regarding the command structure of Roman armies, and the responsibilities of generals in the field. The picture of command that emerges from these narratives is certainly not perfect nor complete, but a lot may be gleaned from them nonetheless.

Sources for the Second Punic War

The trials of command are, at their core, gripping narratives. It is no wonder that the martial deeds of Roman generals feature so prominently in literary sources of the mid-Republic. The challenges for historians lie in distinguishing fact from fiction and attempting to disentangle the literature from the history. Livy provides the most detailed and cohesive literary narrative of the Second Punic War and, aside from Polybius, his text (written in the late first century) is the earliest surviving account of the war. However, his history is heavy with literary embellishment, which frequently takes the form of invented speeches ascribed to key historical figures. Polybius, writing only a few decades after the war, likewise delivers a detailed history of the conflict. Furthermore, in book 6 he presents an outline of the organization and command structure of a Roman legion. Unfortunately, Polybius' narrative from 215 onwards survives only in fragmentary form, and it has been demonstrated that his overview of a legion is heavily idealized and in many ways does not reflect the practical realities of Rome at war.

Nevertheless, these two accounts are indispensable resources for historians of the middle Republic. To reject them outright on the basis of literary embellishment or artistic idealism invalidates any attempt to try and reconstruct the Roman Republic. Furthermore, if they are approached with a realistic degree of caution, if their literary and stylistic elements are recognized and assessed within the context of the larger text, they can nevertheless provide significant insight into the political and military workings of the mid-Republican state.

The competition for magisterial office

Victory in battle was the ultimate goal of a driven Roman aristocrat. Through victory he could (depending on the will of the Senate) celebrate a triumph, adorn his house with the spoils of war, and construct temples or other monuments in fulfilment of vows to deities made in the heat of battle. All of this cemented his success in the larger collective memory of the Republic. Such success affirmed the position of an individual and his family amongst the ranks of the elite, and, in immediate terms, significantly enhanced an aristocrat's status and reputation (*auctoritas*) in relation to his political peers. Indeed, martial ability and a swath of its associated virtues (courage on the battlefield, firmness under adverse circumstances, glory, renown) underpinned the value system (the *mos maiorum*) that informed the behaviour and activities of the Republican elite.

However, throughout the Second Punic War, and for the middle Republic in general, the authority to lead Roman forces in battle was solely possessed by individuals vested with *imperium*. In a ritual sense, *imperium* was the traditional power over life and death once exercised by the kings of Rome, but since Tarquinius' expulsion, this power was conferred upon selected individuals by the larger Republican community. In practical terms, it formally denoted which men possessed the political and legal authority to lead armies in the field, and as such prevented (in theory) the emergence of private armies loyal to individual generals rather than the Roman people. Furthermore, *imperium* was directly linked to certain magisterial offices, notably those of the consuls and praetors. Two consuls and, from 241, four praetors were elected on an annual basis by the Roman populace via the *comitia centuriata*, one of the several voting assemblies that integrate the wider citizen body into the Republican political system. The election to these magisterial offices carried with it a grant of *imperium*, and as such the right to command Roman armies in battle was directly derived from an individual's public office.

Thus, mid-Republican Roman armies were led by elected magistrates who, through their attainment of public office, were vested with *imperium* (see also Drogula in this issue). The forces they would command, as well as the region within which they would operate, were assigned to them by the Senate at the start of a consular year. By extension, a Republican nobleman could not hope to gain control of army, and with it the potential for victory in the field and the glory that entailed, unless he first secured success in the political competition for election to office. As such, there existed a deep-seated and continuous connection between Republican politics and military undertakings. This, in part, explains the fierce and constant competition amongst the elite for high office that pervades the entire Republican period. Given the centrality of military success within the elite value system, it could be assumed that those who gained a reputation for valour and military ability would leverage this reputation to secure repeated success in the competition for political office.

However, this is not necessarily the case. Throughout the third century, instances of individuals who secured repeated election to the consulship, even if they had won military glory as consul in the past, were rare. In the two and a half decades between the Punic Wars (240-219), *consulares* (individuals who had attained the consulship in their lifetime) were only re-elected to the consulship four times. This statistic demonstrates a larger and successful attempt, on the part of wider Republican elite, to prevent the monopolization of high office by singular or small cliques of individuals. The attainment of high office was in and of itself a mark of prestige and honour, and all the better if it was accompanied by the chance to win glory on the battlefield. Lineage and genealogy alone were not sufficient to validate an individual's claim to membership amongst the Roman elite. As such, each new generation of Republican politicians were driven to equal or exceed the achievements of their forebears. The monopolization of high office could spell chaos for the Republic's political equilibrium, hence the care undertaken by the Roman elite to balance the competing interests of its composite members.

Thus, demonstrated military ability did not guarantee election to public office. While in some cases this, and proven courage on the battlefield, certainly may have helped, it was by no means the only personal characteristic, talent, and resource that could foster political success. It would seem that competitive power-sharing took precedence over military ability in the mid-Republic. The struggle for public office was not driven by military success, but was rather a necessary stepping-stone that led towards the battlefield.

The idealized system in practice

This stable structure of high command, with a maximum of two annually elected consuls and three praetors (counting the praetors of Sicily and Sardinia) leading Roman armies in the field, represents what many, especially Roman writers of the late Republic, regard as the perfect form of the military arm of the Republican constitution. However, just as Polybius' outline of the Republican constitution in book 6 largely represents an idealized representation of the Republican 'state', this structure is itself an ideal model of command that did not always reflect reality, especially in times of military crisis. Livy's history of the Second Punic War demonstrates that the stresses of war compelled the Republican elite, as represented by the Senate, to revert to forms of high command that existed outside of this traditional structure. These military appointments were not necessarily unconstitutional (or more accurately: a subversion of the political traditions that informed Rome's uncodified constitution), because there is evidence for their employment during the First Punic War. But again, their complete absence from the historical record between the Punic Wars illustrates their extra-ordinary nature.

The most common extra-ordinary command employed during the Hannibalic War was prorogation. Prorogued magistrates were individuals who had been elected consul or praetor, but following the expiration of their term they were not required to step-down from office. Rather, their *imperium* was extended on a yearly basis by the Senate. The Senate made extensive use of proconsuls and propraetors over the course of the war. While new consuls and praetors were dutifully elected every year, from 216 onwards there were between six and nine promagistrates exercising command in the field or at sea, with an impressive ten men having their commands prorogued in 208 and 203. This broad use of prorogation reflected the burgeoning demands of the war. From the onset of Hannibal's invasion of Italy, Rome was forced to maintain numerous armies at home to combat the Carthaginians and rebellious Italian allies, as well as additional forces to protect Sicily and the Italian islands, maintain the invasion of Punic-held Spain and later Africa (in 205), combat the Macedonians in Greece following the outbreak of the First Macedonian War in 214, and field supporting fleets for all of these theatres of war. This need for commanders who possessed the right to control Roman troops far outnumbered the annually elected consuls and praetors, but the use of prorogation seems to have largely met these demands.

That being said, at times the demands of war exceeded even the flexibility offered by prorogation. In these cases, the Senate resorted to another irregular from of command, the bestowal of *imperium* on private individuals. *Privati* differed from promagistrates in that this grant of *imperium* did not immediately follow their election as consuls or praetors. They were, quite literally, individuals elevated from their private lives to high command on the authority of the Senate or popular voting assemblies (it is uncertain whether grants of *imperium* to *privati* were solely undertaken by the Senate, or required the consent of the Roman people). However, of the twenty-two recorded *privati* who fought in the Hannibalic war (at times it is unclear if individuals with *imperium* were *privati*, or if our sources fail to mention a prorogation of their existing command), almost all these men had served as consuls or praetors at some point in their political careers. As such, these private grants of military authority were not drastic breaks with the ritual and legal underpinnings of *imperium*, but were broadly in keeping with the institutional connection between *imperium* and senior magisterial office.

High command in the mid-Republic was thus not a rigid system set in stone. Rather, the Republican constitution was sufficiently flexible to increase the pool of available commanders in times of crisis, while still adhering to traditional concepts of *imperium* and its associated magisterial offices. Furthermore, it allowed for isolated breaks with precedent (such as the exceptional grant of *imperium* to Scipio Africanus), without these instances drastically endangering or undermining the larger system.

The burden of command

Republican generals sat at the pinnacle of an established, refined, and generally successful hierarchy of command. While commanders with *imperium* led Republican armies, they were aided in this task by a host of junior officers. Both Livy and Polybius refer to commanders being aided in the field by a *consilium*, a group of officers that served as an advisory body to a general. Although our sources do not provide a cohesive overview of the structure and responsibilities of a *consilium*, we do know that it was composed of tribunes, legates, and centurions. These men saw to the host of administrative, logistical, and tactical duties that allowed a legion to function effectively on campaign and in battle. Roman commanders almost certainly worked closely with their *consilia*, and relied heavily upon their junior officers to meet the enormous responsibilities of command.

Thus, failure in battle could rarely be blamed on subordinates, or a break-down in the chain of command. Given this, together with an aristocratic ethos that prioritized military success, and a fiercely competitive culture of political competition for senior office, we can assume that much was expected of a general's tenure in command. But this is not necessarily the case. Consuls and praetors were tasked with crucial religious responsibilities, nominally the maintenance of correct relations with the gods (the *pax deorum*). Before battle, commanders would undertake a complex set of religious rituals, including prayers and a reading of the auspices, to ascertain the will of the gods. However, their favourable disposition towards the impending battle was not bestowed as a result of religious fervour, or due to the special relationship between an individual and the deities, but rather due to the correct observance of ritual protocol. If a general conducted the auspices correctly, it was assumed that the gods approved of their subsequent actions. Furthermore in the rare instances when the auspices were unfavourable they could be taken again and, hopefully, a more positive answer would be returned. Indeed, the incorrect application of religious rites on the part of a commander emerged as a convenient explanation for a military defeat. Livy states that the massacre of a Roman army at Lake Trasimene in 217 was the result of the consul Gaius Flamininus neglecting his religious responsibilities (21.63.5-15 and 22.1.8-20). Generals were not expected to possess a special or unique relationship with the gods, but rather that they correctly observed religious ritual and protocol.

A general certainly had to oversee the practical necessities of war: mobilising the legions assigned to him by the Senate; move them to their assigned theatre of operations; organize necessary logistics; conduct reconnaissance on terrain, a foe's combat strength, and location; and engage the enemy on a strategic and tactical level. But as we have seen, they were greatly aided in these tasks (especially those administrative in nature) by their respective subordinates and advisors. In battle, commanders had to know when to withdraw fatigued maniples from battle, and commit fresh units without destabilizing the battle-line. But in the relatively unchanging order of battle in the mid-Republican legion, these tactical decisions rarely required a significant degree of skill or innovation. In fact, far more depended upon the discipline and bravery of legionaries and their local commanders. Again, this is demonstrated by the tendency amongst the Roman elite, and later writers, to blame military defeats on the actions of the common soldier. Polybius records that following the defeat at the Trebia River in 218, the Senate firmly located the blame for the loss on the soldiers and their lack of training, rather than with the consul Publius Scipio (3.106.5). Following the catastrophic defeat at Cannae in 216, the Senate dispatched the survivors to Sicily in shame, while the architect of this disaster, Gaius Terentius Varro, was simultaneously thanked for not "having lost hope for the republic in this time of crisis" (Livy 22.61.14 on Varro, and 23.25.7-8 on the survivors of Cannae). As Nathian Rosenstein has shown, Republican commanders rarely suffered long term repercussions for presiding over military defeats, with many even securing later election to senior office.

So, what then was expected of commanders in the field? It would appear that, in line with the Republican aristocracy's military ethos, a general's primary responsibility was to lead by example, and demonstrate the same courage, discipline, and determination that he expected from his men. He was expected to expose himself to the same dangers faced by those he commanded, to encourage his men from the frontline, and, if necessary, to lay down his life in service to the state and his army. And in this respect commanders serving in the Hannibalic War exceeded expectations. Ten commanders of consular rank perished between 218 and 201. Flaminius died with his army in 217, as did Lucius Aemelius Paullus, consular colleague of Varro, at Cannae in 216. Titus Sempronius Gracchus was killed in an ambush outside Capua in 213, while the consul Marcius Claudius Marcellus was similarly ambushed and killed while leading a reconnaissance party at Petelia in southern Italy in 208 (with his consular colleague Titus Quinctius Crispinus being mortally wounded in the same encounter). The burden of command rested heavily indeed upon military leaders in the middle Republic. AW

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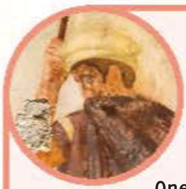
THE COMMANDERS OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

A brief overview of the commanders in the army of Alexander the Great quickly shows a pattern of long-standing relationships, trust, proven ability, leading from the front, and how fortune sometimes turned against them at a whim. Only a few survived the lightning campaigns of their young King, fewer yet are known to be depicted in one way or another.

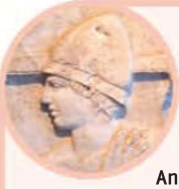


PARMENION

SON OF PHILOTAS

ca. 400–330 BC

One of Philip II's favoured commanders, Parmenion was instrumental in defeating the Illyrians in 356 BC. As Philip's second in command, he was sent on various missions around Greece. In 336 BC, Parmenion was sent in advance into Asia with 10,000 men to prepare for the king's invasion. After Philip's death, Parmenion remained with his army, loyal to Alexander. During the invasion of Asia, Parmenion was second in command, holding the left wing, while Alexander commanded the right. He fought at the battles of the Granicus, the Issus, and Gaugamela. He also led separate expeditions, such as subduing central Anatolia and capturing Tarsus. He was assassinated on Alexander's orders in 330 BC.



ANTIPATER

SON OF IOLSOS

ca. 400–319 BC

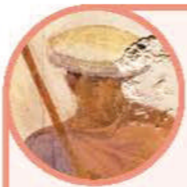
Antipater was one of Philip II's Companion Cavalry and had probably served Philip's older brother, Perdiccas III (r. 365–360 BC), as well. One of Alexander's key supporters when he came to the throne, Antipater was entrusted as regent of Greece in Alexander's absence from 334 BC onwards, although he clashed with Olympias, Alexander's mother. He put down several revolts and the Lamian War after Alexander's death. Although Alexander despatched Craterus and Polysperchon to replace Antipater as regent in 324 BC, he was confirmed as viceroy of Greece after Alexander's death and his son, Cassander (355–297 BC), would become ruler of southern Greece (317–297 BC).

NICANOR

SON OF PARMENION

ca. 360–330 BC

First mentioned in the campaigns against the Getae in 335 BC, Nicanor there commanded the phalanx, while Alexander led the cavalry. The army crossed the Danube without a bridge and Nicanor led the way through the corn fields while the cavalry followed. He also advanced the phalanx (unusually) in a square formation (Anabasis 1.4.1). Thereafter, however, Nicanor was was put in command of the 3000-strong unit of Hypaspists. This seems to have been an informal command but one which showed the great trust placed in him. Nicanor led the Hypaspists at the Granicus, the Issus, and at Gaugamela. He then accompanied his king in the pursuit of Darius III but died of disease during the invasion of Bactria in 330 BC. His death probably saved Alexander from a difficult decision since he was spared from having to decide to execute Nicanor along with his brother Philotas and their father Parmenion later in 330.

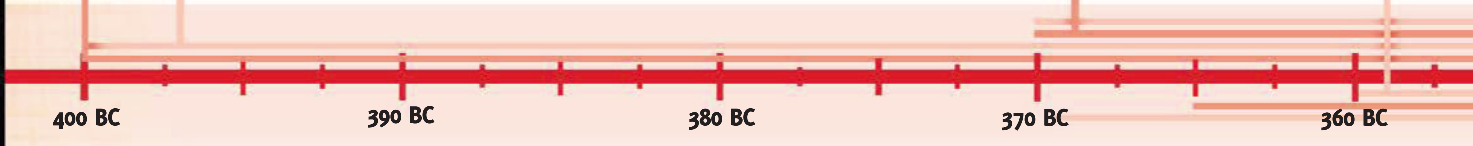


COENUS

SON OF POLEMOCRATES

ca. 370–326 BC

One of Alexander's most trusted *taxis* commander's, Coenus fought in a prominent position in all of Alexander's battles. He commanded the right-most *taxis* at the Issus and at Gaugamela which went forward with Alexander's own attacks. Coenus was, nonetheless, the accuser of his brother-in-law, Philotas, in 330 BC. He continued to command, being entrusted with greater responsibility (such as one part of the army in the subjugation of Sogdiana and he led an expedition into Scythia), although he retained command of his *taxis* in battles fought under Alexander's command. Sometimes he was selected for special operations, such as against the Rock of Aornus (Arrian, 4.28). He transported the fleet overland from the Indus to the Hydaspes (Arrian, 5.8) and fought in the subsequent battle (Arrian, 5.16–17). He was one of the first and loudest to speak out against Alexander's paln to continue east but died of fever on the return from the Hyphasis River in 326 BC.



CRATERUS

SON OF ALEXANDER

ca. 370–321 BC

One of Alexander's trusted *taxis* commanders, Craterus commanded the left-most *taxis* of the phalanx at the Granicus, the Issus, and at Gaugamela. This position meant he was also in command of the left three *taxeis*, albeit under the overall commanded of Parmenion. He was promoted to independent command in Hyrcania. He was wounded at Cyropolis and defeated the Massagetians independently. He commanded a large force sent against the rebel commanders Catanes and Austanes and was victorious. Often left with the responsibility of protecting the camp in India, he commanded the rear-guard at the Battle of the Hydaspes. On the return down the Hydaspes and down the Acesines and the Indus, Craterus commanded half of the army. During the revolt of Musicanus, Craterus was given the responsibility of commanding the elephants. In 324 BC, Craterus, with Polyperchon, led 11,500 men back to Macedon, apparently with instructions to replace Antipater as regent, but he found no fleet; he learned of Alexander's death while he was in Cilicia building one. He crossed to Macedonia in the Lamian War but did not replace Antipater. He joined the revolt against Perdiccas but was killed in battle against Eumenes in 321 BC.

PHILOTAS

SON OF PARMENION

ca. 365–330 BC

Eldest son of Parmenion, Philotas was appointed as the commander of the *Hetairoi* (Companion Cavalry) when Alexander came to the throne. He fought in this capacity against the Triballians, at the Granicus, the siege of Halicarnassus, the Issus, and at Gaugamela. He was also entrusted with independent missions, such as to Mycale in 334 BC (Arrian, 1.19.2). A capable commander, he was, nonetheless, not well liked and not able to cope with diplomacy. In 330 BC, Philotas was implicated in a plot against Alexander and put to death – among his accusers was his brother-in-law and another of Alexander's commanders, Coenus.

PTOLEMY

SON OF LAGUS

ca. 369–282 BC

Ptolemy probably fought in all of Alexander's early campaigns but only came to prominence as a commander later. He may be mentioned as a commander at the Siege of Halicarnassus and in Caria, but he's not the only Ptolemy in the army. After Issus, he accompanied Alexander in the pursuit of Darius. He was with Alexander in Egypt and was made one of the personal bodyguards of Alexander in 332 BC. In Bactria, he was given command of a large force to join two satraps in pursuit of Bessus. When the army was split into five parts for the subjugation of Sogdiana, Ptolemy was given command of one part. He was wounded fighting the Aspasians, but assisted in the taking of Sangala. After Alexander's death, Ptolemy seized the body and took it to Egypt. He joined in a coalition against Perdiccas, then consolidated his control over Egypt and founded the longest-lasting of the Successor kingdoms. Ptolemy's history of Alexander's campaigns was also one of the most important sources for later historians of Alexander.

HEPHAESTION

SON OF AMYNTOR

ca. 356–324 BC

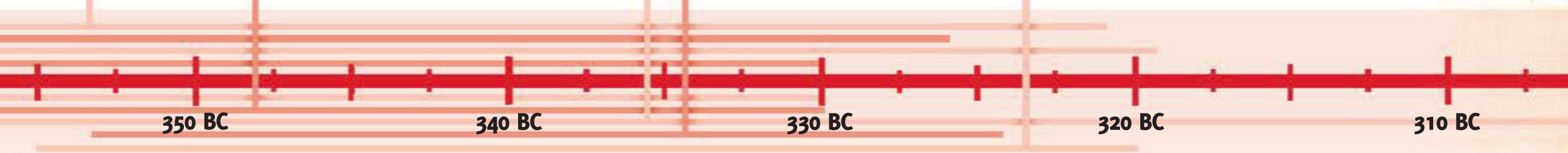
Alexander's closest friend and companion since childhood, Hephaestion was a member of Alexander's personal bodyguard. He was a distinguished commander in his own right. He is not mentioned before the Battle of Issus in 333 BC, but he was likely already an experienced cavalryman and commander since, after the battle, he was sent to Sidon to appoint a king who would be loyal to Alexander. He then commanded the fleet during the Siege of Tyre. Despite this obvious favour, the first time Hephaestion is mentioned as commander of the bodyguards was at Gaugamela, where he was wounded. In 330 BC, he was appointed joint commander of the Companion Cavalry with Cleitus the Black and fought at the Battle of the Hydaspes in 326 BC. He was then entrusted with half the army for the return from India. Hephaestion rose to be second in command of Alexander's empire – being appointed *chiliarch*, and he was married to one of Darius III's daughters. He died unexpectedly at Ecbatana in 324 BC.

PERDICCAS

SON OF ORONTES

ca. 355–320 BC

One of Alexander's close friends, Perdiccas commanded a *taxis* of the phalanx against the Taulantians. He fought at Thebes, attacking with his *taxis* without orders, achieving a breakthrough, but badly wounded. He again commanded a *taxis* at the Granicus, at Halicarnassus, at the Issus, and at Gaugamela where he was again wounded. By the time of the taking of the Sogdian rock, he is named as a bodyguard of Alexander, perhaps representing a promotion. He was given command of half the army in India. At the crossing of the Hydaspes in 326 BC, Perdiccas is named as a cavalry commander. He was given prominent command against the Mallians, commanding half the army and he saved his king's life there. Perdiccas received Alexander's signet ring on his death and he acted as regent on behalf of Alexander's brother and young son. He took command of Alexander's army and ruled from Babylon but was assassinated in 320 BC.



The tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam, near Persepolis, Iran, depicts the enormous ethnic variety of the soldiers in the Great King's armies.

CONTEXT AND CONTINUITY

By Gareth Williams

THE BATTLE OF ARTEMISIUM

A fragment of the Theban lyric poet, Pindar, states: "First at Artemisium the children of the Athenians laid the shining foundation of freedom." This sea battle took place in 480 BC, as the Greeks desperately sought to prevent Xerxes' Persian invasion of Greece. (Plutarch *Themistocles* 8.2). The earliest record of this battle is by Herodotus, but his abbreviated report has caused confusion. By supplementing Herodotus with the historian Diodorus' account, however, and paying attention to both context and the continuity of strategy, it appears Artemisium not only supported the Greek strategy, but actually proved its worth.

Bust of Themistocles, the Athenian behind the tactics of Artemisium. Themistocles was no aristocrat, but a wily and talented politician who had himself elected *strategos*.
© Metropolitan Museum of Art

What was this strategy? At the isthmus of Corinth, the Greeks considered how to wage war while being greatly outnumbered by Persian soldiers and ships. To prevent Xerxes from moving further south, the Greeks determined to hold the pass at Thermopylae, realising that the Persians would not be able to take advantage of their superior numbers due to the narrow geography. One major problem was foreseen, however: the Greek army might become surrounded if the Persian fleet were able to enter the Malian Gulf and disembark soldiers in the rear of the Greek position at Thermopylae. The Spartan commander at Thermopylae, Leonidas, reassured his allies, however, that "the sea was being guarded and defended by the Athenians, Aeginetans, and other naval contingents" at Artemisium. The strategy to nullify the numerical advantage of the Persians seems obvious at the Thermopylae pass, but not so at Artemisium, if we accept the traditional view of the campaign there (see Herodotus 7.203).

Although the Spartan Eurybiades was nominally in charge of the 273 ships of the Greek fleet at Artemisium, it was the Athenian Themistocles who adopted the tactical lead. His thoughts regarding the way to conduct the sea battle at Artemisium are reflected in his words about the later naval en-

© A.Davey / Wikimedia Commons

gagement in the narrows at Salamis. Rather than defending the Corinthian isthmus, a tactic favoured by the Spartans, Themistocles declared: "If the battle takes place by the Isthmus, you'll be fighting in the open sea, which puts us at a distinct disadvantage, since our ships are heavier and we are outnumbered … [in the Salamis channel] our few ships will be taking on a larger fleet in a confined space (Greek: *stenos* "narrows") … fighting in a confined space favours us, but fighting in the open favours them" (Herodotus 8.60). The question then is why did the Greeks choose to fight at Artemisium, which is open water, thereby contradicting Themistocles' own strategy?

The clashing of ships

A double shekel showing a Phoenician galley and the Persian king in his chariot.

© www.cngcoins.com

The area around Artemisium is, indeed, open water but it becomes narrower some thirteen kilometres westwards, at the Oreos channel, whose entrance was 5.6 km wide — narrowing in certain places to about 3.2 km wide along sections of its 27 km length. These narrows led to the Malian Gulf and Thermopylae. Despite losing some 400 ships (of their total of 1,200) in a violent storm, and sustaining much damage to other ships, the Persians rounded the Cape of Magnesia. Due to their large numbers, they were unable to find a single harbour, but, by early afternoon, they had beached their ships at harbours around Aphetae, 16 km across the open sea from Artemisium.

Some Persians suggested attacking the Greeks immediately, but others were concerned the Greeks would escape. To counter this, they sent 200 ships to circumnavigate the island of Euboea, hoping to block any Greek retreat through the Oreos channel. The Persians planned to postpone their attack until these ships were in place — a possible delay of two days. Therefore, they "had no intention of attacking the Greeks that day … and the Persians occupied themselves with counting the ships that were left at Aphetae" (Herodotus 8.7), a task made more difficult by their being moored in different harbours. While the Persians assessed the storm damage and arranged necessary repairs, a deserter informed the Greeks of the situation. The Greek commanders discussed what to do next.

Themistocles was determined to engage the Persians, wanting to test the Greek fleet and gain knowledge of Persian tactics. His strategy was clear: "It was to their advantage to sail against the enemy with the whole fleet in one array … for they would have the upper hand … attacking with their ships in a single body an enemy whose formation was broken by disorder, as it must be, for they would be issuing out of many harbours at some distance apart" (Diodorus 11.12.5).

Themistocles may well have selected a harbour to attack where the Persian ships were more or less equal to their own numbers, or even where some of the damaged ships lay. In total, the Persian ships opposite them now numbered six hundred. The Greeks' newly acquired intelligence had reassured them that

A copy of the 'Themistocles decree' concerning the evacuation of Athens and the naval defence of the city before the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC. This third century BC copy is from Troezen, Greece.

© Livius.org

Copy of a bronze conical helmet from the Athenian weapon dedication to Olympia, which contained part of the Persian booty from the Battle of Marathon. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Olympia.

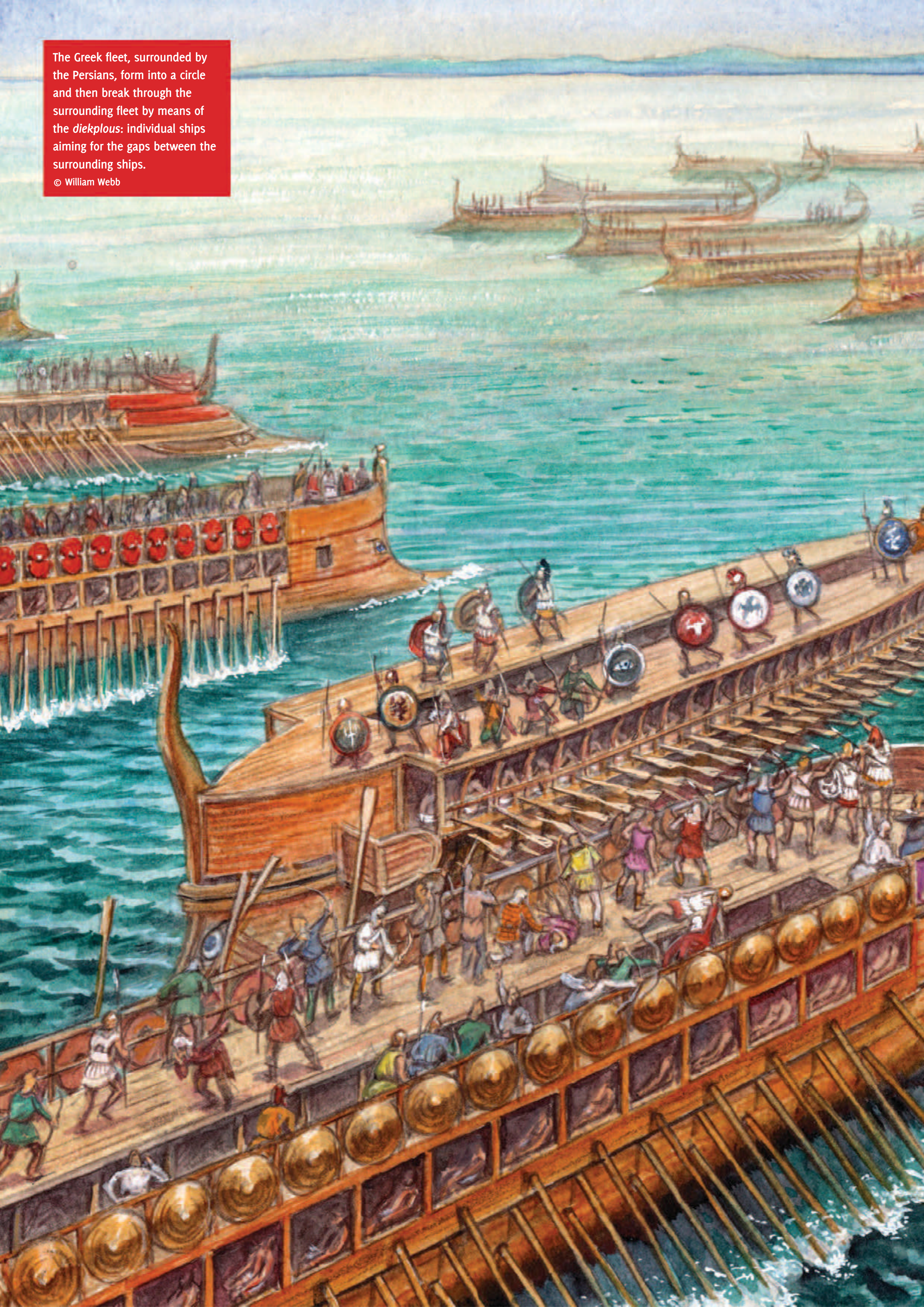
© Pimpinellus / Wikimedia Commons

The writing is on the wall

After withdrawing from Artemisium, Themistocles instructed the sailors of the Allied fleet to write slogans on the cliffs of Euboea and mainland Greece at watering posts, encouraging the Ionian sailors to defect (Herodotus 8.22). Themistocles reasoned that, even if the Ionians remained loyal to their Persian overlords, the messages would sow the seeds of mistrust in the minds of Xerxes and the Persians: "Men of Ionia, you do wrongly to fight against the land of your fathers and bring slavery upon Hellas. It were best of all that you should join yourselves to us; but if that be impossible for you, then do you even now withdraw yourselves from the war, and entreat the Carians to do the same as you. If neither of these things may be, and you are fast bound by such constraint that you cannot rebel, yet we pray you not to use your full strength in the day of battle; be mindful that you are our sons and that our quarrel with the foreigner was of your making in the beginning." After the War, the Ionian cities fell into the sphere of the Athenian Empire.

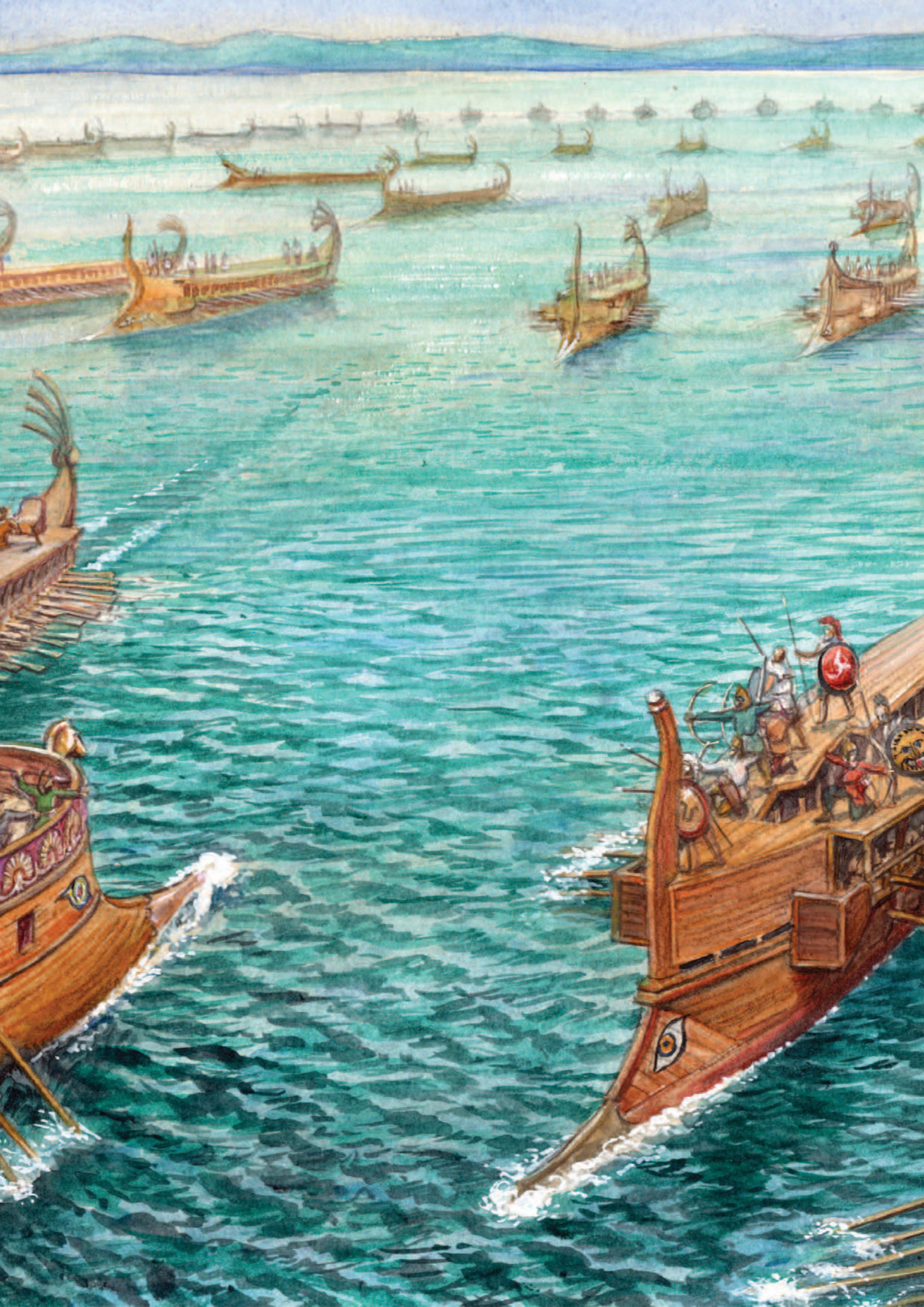
A terracotta model of a trireme, thought to represent the Phoenician variant of this galley.

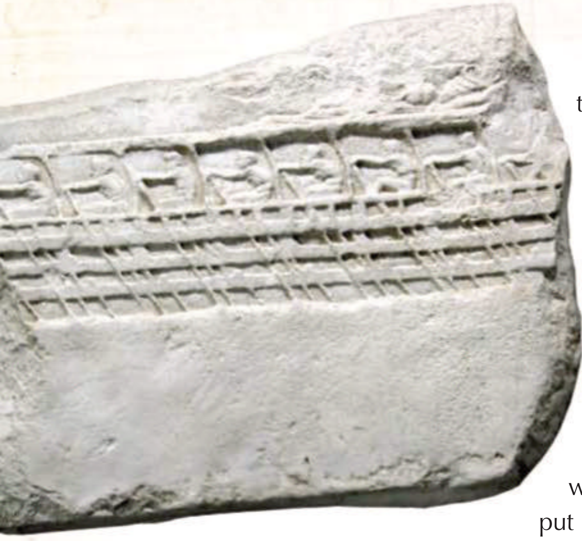
© Livius.org



The Greek fleet, surrounded by the Persians, form into a circle and then break through the surrounding fleet by means of the *diekplous*: individual ships aiming for the gaps between the surrounding ships.

© William Webb





The 'Lenormant Relief' found on the Athenian acropolis in 1862 shows the central part of a trireme with nine rowers in position, the lower banks of oars and part of the upper deck. It may be the *Paralos*, named after the discoverer of navigation and the sacred vessel of the Athenians that was only used on official state visits.

© Nemoleon / Flickr

the Persians were unprepared for any assault. The Greeks agreed to Themistocles' plan, choosing to attack later in the day, so that if things did go awry, the onset of evening would naturally limit the time for fighting. Toward late afternoon, therefore, the Persians were surprised to see the Greek fleet advancing toward them.

Initially, the plan went well: "And since the barbarians put out from many harbours, at the outset, Themistocles, engaging with the scattered Persians, sank many ships and not a few he forced to turn around in flight … but later, when the whole [Persian] fleet had gathered and a fierce battle ensued, each side gained superiority in one part of the line but neither won a complete victory" (Diodorus 12.6). There had been further complications for the Persians as dissension among their allies saw some Ionian crews refuse, or make excuses, not to join the battle.

Although they were becoming surrounded, the Greek ships formed a circle (Herodotus 8.11.1) with rams facing out and undertook the *diekplous* tactic to break through the line of Persian ships. While the "battle was still in the balance", evening fell, and both fleets returned to their respective ports.

The Greeks had captured 30 Persian ships along with the defection of a Lemnian ship. The battle had certainly not gone according to Persian expectations, and the bad news kept coming. That night, another heavy thunderstorm battered the Persian ships, the winds and currents driving wreckage ashore from their defeated ships as well as corpses, all of which became entangled in their oars. The superstitious mariners began to fear for their safety. Morale sank yet lower. At the outset, a violent storm had eliminated many ships; after limping into Aphetae they were attacked, losing more ships and men. Now, they were being battered by a second storm, which, incidentally, destroyed the squadron of 200 ships rounding Euboea. Were the gods angry at them?

Much like Thermopylae

The next day after the night of storms, "the Persians at Aphetae were delighted to see daybreak, and left their ships idle. They had been so badly mauled that they were content just to keep quiet for the time being" (Herodotus 8.14). The Greeks meanwhile, perhaps being informed of the Persian's low morale, repeated their previous day's tactics and sailed out in the late afternoon in another surprise attack. This time, they attacked and destroyed a few Cilician ships, which were possibly scouting the area and proved easy pickings for the Greeks. By continuing their strategy of fighting reduced numbers, the Greeks were managing to lower the number of enemy ships and build confidence in their own crews.

Pottery fragment of a trireme prow with an apotropaic Ophthalmos (ship's eye).

© Dan Diffendale / Flickr

The Persian commanders became angry at the situation, and feared Xerxes' wrath for

The *diekplous*

The tactic used by the Greek fleet at Artemisum, the *diekplous*, was called the most effective manoeuvre in sea fighting by Polybius (1.51.9). Although it crops up in several naval engagements, such as at Lade in 494 BC (Herodotus 6.15.2), Chios in 201 BC (Polybius 16.4.14), and Side in 190 BC (Livy 37.24.2), its use at Artemisum is perhaps the most famous.

The word itself means "a sailing through and out" — that is: ships passing through and out of the enemy line. As such, the tactic seems to have avoided ramming and therefore avoiding the risk of getting lodged in enemy ships. Once the ships had passed through gaps in the enemy line, they would turn to attack the sides and stern of enemy ships. At Artemisium, the Persians outnumbered the Greeks so there would have been more than enough gaps for each Greek ship to aim for one.

Herodotus implies that the Persians were attempting to surround the Greek fleet (8.10.1-2, taking advantage of their superior numbers) and so the Greeks formed a circle with their rams pointed outwards (8.11.1) — they then (individually) used the *diekplous* to break through the enemy line and escape, taking 30 enemy ships in doing so.

Trireme ram from the Pireus Museum. The three horizontal blades were probably designed to separate the planks of the opposing ship before breaking them individually with the vertical front edge of the ram.

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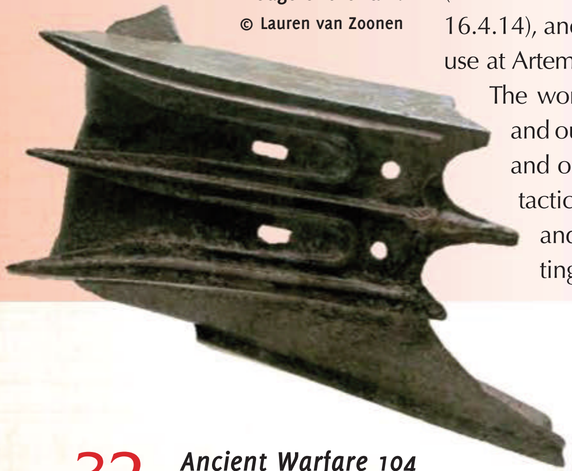


Greek scaraboid depicting a galley – not a trireme, but possibly a smaller pentekonter.

© Metropolitan Museum of Art

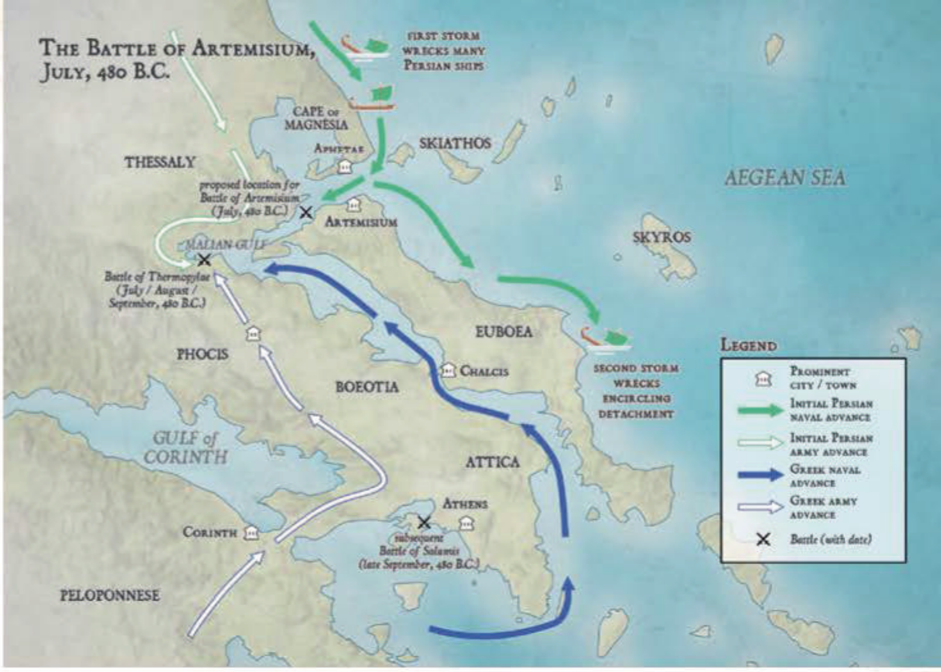
their losses against so few Greek ships. They decided that, rather than allow the Greeks to initiate further fighting, they would prepare to launch their ships at midday, the third day after their arrival at Aphetae. Herodotus' account now becomes blurred. The Persians adopted a crescent formation, and the Greeks "sailed out against them" to join battle. Fighting in open water was something Themistocles had adamantly opposed. By supplementing Herodotus' account with Diodorus', however, events become clearer: "The sea battle which followed was *much like the fighting at Thermopylae*; for the Persians were resolved to overwhelm the Greeks and force their way through … while the Greeks, [blocked] the narrows (*stenos*) …" (Diodorus 11.13.2, italics mine).

The reference to "like … Thermopylae" implies that the Greeks, possibly being warned that the Persian fleet was sailing against them, were waiting for the Persians, choosing to fight in the "narrows". That is, in the Oreos channel, blocking the way through to the Malian Gulf. Why was that strategically necessary? Their remit was to protect the land forces at Thermopylae. If they had met the Persians off Artemisium, their fewer ships could be kept busy fighting, while some of the Persian fleet could break off and sail through the channel and attack the rear of the Greek army at Thermopylae. This would also explain Herodotus' later statement that: "there were so many ships in Xerxes' fleet that it kept falling foul of itself, as ships were thrown into disarray and collided with one another" (Herodotus 8.16). An apt description of large numbers of ships fighting in a limited space.

Both sides lost ships and men, but Herodotus states that the Persians came off far worse. How true that is we cannot know, but we are informed that both sides were glad to return to their respective anchorages. That the Greeks possibly had control of the waters may be suggested by the fact that they were able to retrieve their dead and their disabled ships. They had been so badly mauled, however, that they seriously contemplated retreat — doubting they could effectively offer battle the next day. It was around this time that news of the destruction of the forces at Thermopylae reached them. With there being no strategic value in remaining in position, they left Artemisium in good order. This also reveals that the Persians had little desire to prevent them going.

Bronze and iron spear points from Thermopylae, probably related to the defense of the pass in 480 BC.

© Lauren van Zoonen


The Battle of Artemisium, July, 480 B.C.
First storm wrecks many Persian ships
Cape of Magnesia
Aphetae
Thessaly
Skiathos
Aegean Sea
proposed location for Battle of Artemisium (July, 480 B.C.)
Artemisium
Malian Gulf
Battle of Thermopylae (July / August / September, 480 B.C.)
Skyros
Euboea
Phocis
Chalcis
Boeotia
Second storm wrecks encircling detachment
Legend
Prominent city / town
Initial Persian naval advance
Initial Persian army advance
Greek naval advance
Greek army advance
Battle (with date)
Gulf of Corinth
Attica
Athens
Corinth
subsequent Battle of Salamis (late September, 480 B.C.)
Peloponnese

(*Top*) The manoeuvrings during the Artemisium and Thermopylae campaigns reveal a coordinated approach — just as described by Herodotus.

© Richard Thomson

(*Bottom*) The straits of Artemisium looking towards Cape Magnesia. The battle was most likely fought in the narrower parts of the strait (to the left) which favoured the Greek fleet.

© Livius.org

By sticking to the context of the situation — the protection of their land forces — and Themistocles' desire to remain consistent with the determined strategy, the Greeks were able to reap the benefits. Themistocles realised the advantages of their strategy, no doubt strengthening his belief in the tactics he would later suggest at Salamis. As Pindar stated, these difficult engagements had proved the worth of Greek sailors and ships, they had "laid the shining foundation of freedom" since, by the next year, the Persians would be pushed out of Greece. AW

Gareth Williams has a BA (Hons.) in Art and Art History and has written articles on Greek, Roman, and medieval history.

Attic 'eye cup' with galleys under sail depicted at the handles.

© Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Land Gate of Pan Men – at the time of its construction the only entrance and exit to Suzhou – the capital of Wu, begun under King Helu of Wu.

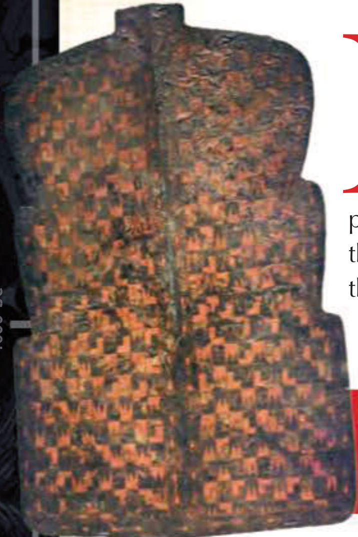
SUN TZU SEALS HIS REPUTATION?

THE BATTLE OF BOJU

By Murray Dahm

The most famous battle associated with the legendary Chinese strategist and military writer Sun Tzu (ca. 544–496 BC) was a battle fought between two Chinese states. The Wu victory at the Battle of Boju in November 506 BC, apparently brought about through Sun Tzu's genius, saw the formerly powerful state of Chu eclipsed by the state of Wu and ultimately led to the subsequent Warring States Period (ca. 475–221 BC).

For centuries, the Zhou dynasty's control of China had gradually dissipated, drastically weakening after the royal court's move to the east in the eighth century. The waning of the Zhou dynasty's power is best demonstrated by the breakaway of the state of Chu in the ninth century, followed by that of Wu and, later, Yue. Chu came to dominate much of southeastern China, and the state of Wu, located at the mouth of the Yangtze River, was initially a vassal of Chu. In 584, however, Wu rebelled against Chu, and became a thorn in Chu's side, encouraging similar rebellions among Chu's other vassal states. The two states fought ten wars against one another, with Wu mostly coming out on top.



Chu lacquered shield with dragon and phoenix design from the Warring States period (457-221 BC).

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Sun Tzu

According to Sima Qian's biography of Sun Tzu – written around 97 BC, 400 years after Sun Tzu's death — the tactician was summoned to the royal court of Wu after King Helu read his *Art of War*, intending to test his abilities. Sun Tzu was ordered to demonstrate his precepts by training the king's concubines to act as soldiers. Having successfully done so, Sun Tzu was appointed a general of Wu, leading to his association with the Battle of Boju.

Much of what we know about Sun Tzu is uncertain, however. For instance, Sima Qian tells us that Sun Tzu was born in the state of Wu and that his courtesy name was Wu. On the other hand, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of the state of Lu, likely written in the fifth century BC, record

Eastern Zhou Dynasty bronze Mao spearhead from the Spring and Autumn Period.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Sun Tzu's *Art of War*

The *Art of War* is divided into thirteen chapters with multiple sub sections examining the essential tenets of the art of war. These break down as follows: "calculations", "doing battle", "planning attacks", "formation", "force", "weakness and strength", "armed struggle", "nine changes", "army manoeuvres", "ground formation", "nine grounds", "fire attacks", and "using spies". There are five factors of warfare to be studied: Way, Heaven, Ground, General, and Law. Many of the precepts in the *Art of War* are deceptively straightforward or seemingly self-evident, often expressed in a pithy statement such as "Know thine enemy, know thyself" (chapter 3). This belies the subtleties of the underlying concept. More properly, the chapter reads "One who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be in danger in a hundred battles."

Replica of the roll of bamboo tablets containing the *Art of War*, now in the China printing museum, Beijing, China.

© Popolon / Wikimedia Commons

that he was born in the state of Qi, north of both Chu and Wu. Doubt about the reality of Sun Tzu appeared in the twelfth century AD. He is not mentioned in *The Commentary of Zuo*, completed around 300 BC, which names most of the important figures of the period. The name Sun Wu (meaning something like "valiant fugitive" or "fugitive warrior") in Sima Qian's biography may even have been invented. His story of Sun Tzu also echoes aspects of the biography of Wu Zixu, a Chu general and minister who had fled to the state of Wu after his father and brother were killed in Chu. What is more, the earliest parts of the *Art of War* seem to date from around a century later, during the Warring States Period. The text mentions weapons, tenets of philosophy, even events, which could not have been known in the late sixth century.

Bronze Zhou Dynasty helmet from ca. the eighth century BC, now in Taiwan. Note the small animal crest.

© Gary Todd / Flickr

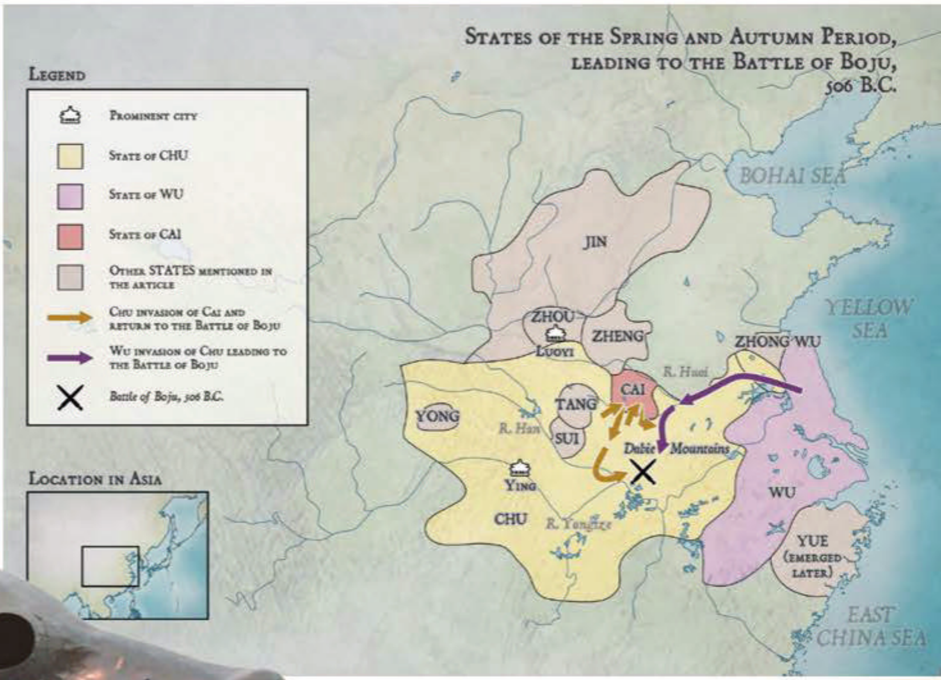
The Battle of Boju

In 512, having destroyed the small Chu vassal states of Xu and Zhongwu, King Helu divided his army into three and harassed the state of Chu to weaken its forces, resting two thirds of his own forces between campaigns. He also withdrew his own forces before each Chu counterattack, keeping them largely intact, in accordance with the teachings found in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. After six years of such draining campaigns, in 506, the Chu general Nang Wa led Chu forces against the state of Cai, which had submitted to Wu. Cai asked for assistance, and, with encouragement from general Wu Zixu, King Helu of Wu answered, invading the state of Chu. He was accompanied by his younger brother Fugai (commanding the vanguard), Wu Zixu, and — according to one version of events — by Sun Tzu.

The state of Wu mobilized 30,000 troops and sailed up the Huai River towards Cai territory. At their approach, the Chu general Nang Wa broke off his siege of Cai and returned home. King Helu was then joined by additional forces from Cai and from the state of Tang for the invasion. After advancing along the river, the army stopped, left the river, and marched southwards overland. This move was unexpected, and the Wu army was able to march through the mountain passes unopposed and penetrate deep into Chu territory. Soon, they had reached the eastern bank of the Han River (the modern Han Jiang).

The states of the Spring and Autumn Period showing the Chu invasion of Cai and the subsequent Wu invasion of Chu.

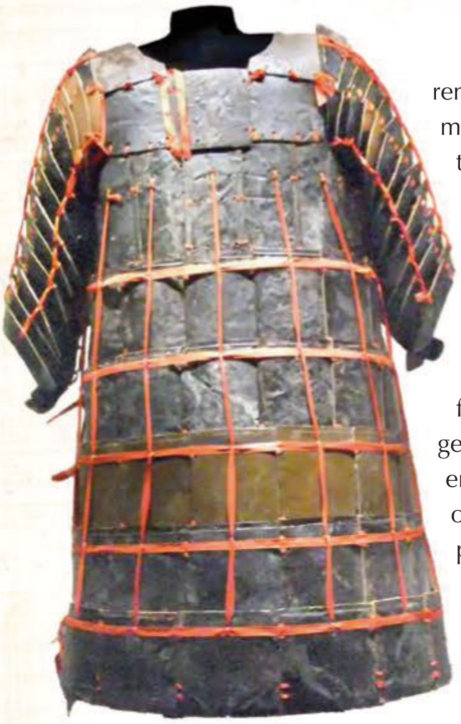
© Richard Thomson



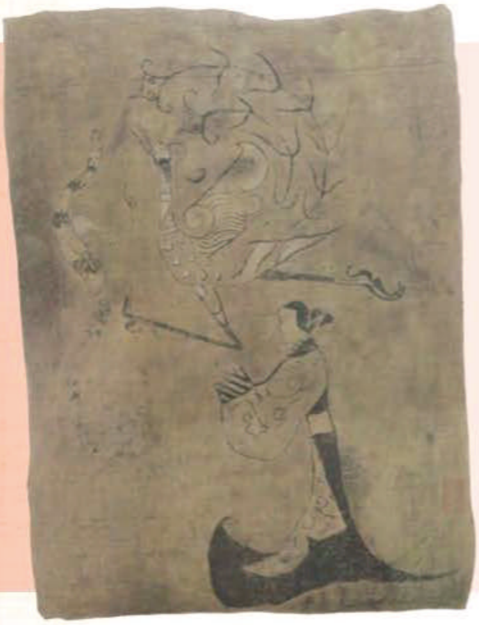
States of the Spring and Autumn Period, leading to the Battle of Boju, 506 B.C.
Legend
Prominent city
State of CHU
State of WU
State of CAI
Other STATES mentioned in the article
Chu invasion of Cai and return to the Battle of Boju
Wu invasion of Chu leading to the Battle of Boju
Battle of Boju, 506 B.C.
Location in Asia
BOHAI SEA
JIN
ZHOU
LUOYI
ZHENG
ZHONG WU
YELLOW SEA
R. Huai
CAI
TANG
YONG
R. Han
SUI
Dabie Mountains
YING
CHU
R. Yangtze
WU
YUE (EMERGED LATER)
EAST CHINA SEA

Horse armour from the tomb of Yi of Zeng, a nobleman who lived during the Zhou dynasty.

© Gary Todd / Flickr



Leather armour from the Warring States Period (457-221 BC) found in 2002 in Zaoyang, Hubei Province, and now in the Hubei Provincial Museum, Wuhan, China.
© Huangdan2060 / Wikimedia Commons



Replica of a silk banner found in the tomb of a Chu woman from the Warring States period. Dating to the third century BC, the original is one of the oldest silk paintings ever found it China. Such images were meant to help guide the deceased to the afterlife: here, a dragon and phoenix assist the woman on her journey.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

DID YOU KNOW?

Sun Tzu is actually a title meaning "Master Sun", not a full name. Instead, Sun Tzu may have been born as Sun Wu.

The king of Chu mobilized all his remaining forces — he may have had as many as 300,000 men in total — to defend the west bank of the Han River. He sent another force led by Shen Yinshu to cut off the retreat of the Wu forces, seize the mountain passes they had just used, and to destroy their ships on the Huai River. This force, in combination with that defending the river, could then take the forces of Wu in a pincer movement. Chu general Nang Wa, left defending the western bank of the river, decided to act on his own, however, before the pincer was complete. He was probably encouraged to do so by the historian Shi Huang, who exploited the general's jealousy of his rival Shen Yinshu, to ensure that he got sole credit for the defeat of Wu. Thus, Nang Wa crossed the river with his forces to defeat the forces of Wu on the eastern bank of the Han River by himself. As Nang Wa and the Chu troops advanced, the outnumbered Wu forces retired (just as the *Art of War* prescribed). Nang Wa, thinking himself on the brink of victory, pursued, despite the fact his troops were not equipped nor ready for such a pursuit, since they had only been assembled to defend their side of the river. Three engagements fought in Xiaobie (modern Hubei) between the river and the Dabie mountains resulted in Wu victories. Whether they had expected the jealous Nang Wa to operate independently is unclear.

At Boju (probably located at modern Macheng, Hubei, at the foot of the Dabei mountains), Nang Wa reorganized his forces and deployed for battle on 19 November. King Helu's brother, Fugai, suggested attacking the enemy at once, sure that the Chu forces were unwilling to fight for their cruel and unpopular general Nang Wa, but this was rejected by the king. Fugai, however, stated "I will now give an illustration of the saying that a minister does what is right without waiting for orders. I will die today, but [the capital of] Chu can be entered [in consequence]" (*The Commentary of Zuo* 11.14). He then led his vanguard of 5000 troops into an attack on the Chu forces, despite being heavily outnumbered. As he had predicted, they broke at his first charge. Seeing this, King Helu committed his entire army, and the Chu army soon collapsed. Shi Huang fell in the battle fighting from his chariot, Nang Wa fled to the vassal state of Zheng, and what remained of the Chu army — probably still outnumbering the pursuing Wu soldiers — retreated to the west, to the Qingfa River (the modern Fuhe River, west of Anlu, Hubei). Rather than at-

Chu lacquered quiver from the Warring States Period. Archery was a mainstay of Chinese armies.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

Sun Tzu and the concubines of the king of Wu

King Helu commanded Sun Tzu him to demonstrate his abilities by taking the king's harem of 180 concubines and training them in military drill. Sun Tzu appointed the two favourites as captains and placed each in command of a company. They were given spears and Sun Tzu explained the orders he would give. The captains agreed that they would obey. When Sun Tzu issued the orders, however, the concubines fell about laughing. He explained the orders again but once more the concubines laughed. Sun Tzu admonished them – when a general's orders are unclear, disobedience is the general's fault but, when orders are clear, blame for disobedience falls on the officers. He ordered the execution of the two captains for disobedience. The king attempted to prevent the execution of his two favourites but Sun Tzu insisted that he had to fulfil his orders (train the concubines) whatever the cost. The execution went ahead. He appointed two new captains and this time the orders were followed to the letter.

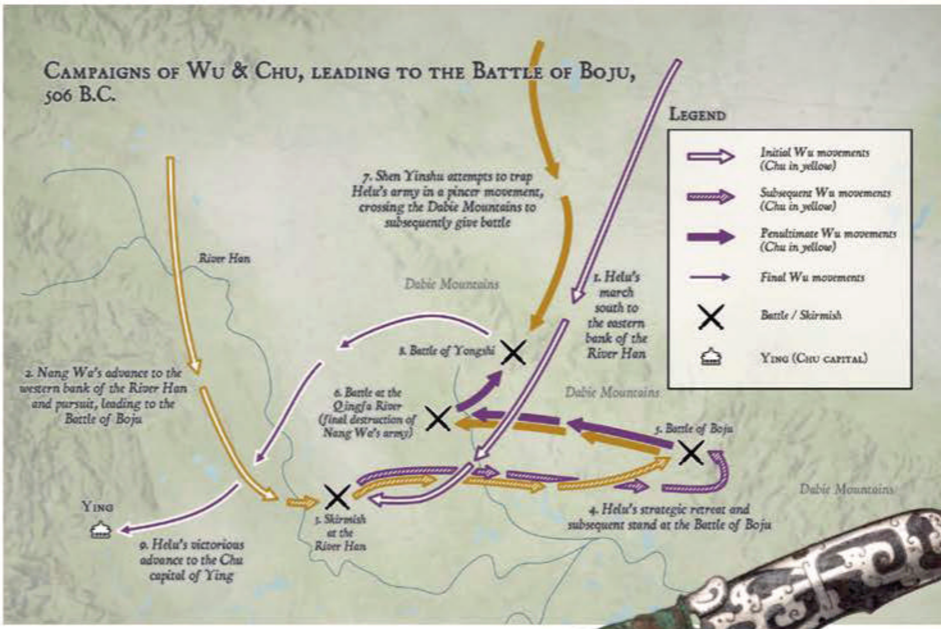
tack them with their backs to the river, where they would be forced into a desperate fight, Fugai suggested allowing them to begin to cross: "If they know that there is no escape for them, and so fight to the death, they will be sure to defeat us" (*The Commentary of Zuo* 11.15). Fugai continued that if, however, the Chu forces were allowed to begin to cross the river they would know they had an escape route and would rout when attacked, their minds on flight rather than fight. And so, the Wu army waited until the Chu forces began to cross and only then attacked. In the resulting rout (just as predicted), half the Chu army was captured. Those who had already made it across now fled towards the state of Yong, further west, but they were surprised en route at mealtime by the (still) pursuing troops of Wu. They fled and the Wu troops ate the food the men of Chu had been preparing. They then defeated the hungry men of Chu at a place called Yongshi.

Chu general Shen Yinshu, advancing from the mountains learned of the predicament of his compatriots who had attacked without him and marched to intervene. He met and defeated Fugai's vanguard troops at Yongshi, who were exhausted by their long and successful pursuit and probably not expecting anyone to counterattack them. Shen Yinshu was, however, wounded during this small victory. The rest of the Wu forces arrived and surrounded Shen Yinshu's army. Shen Yinshu, who could not countenance being taken captive by Wu, commanded a subordinate to cut off his head and take it to the king. The faithful officer obliged.

Aftermath

Following the defeat, King Zhao fled Chu to the small vassal kingdom of Sui, pursued all the way by Wu. The Chu capital, Ying (possibly modern Jingzhou, or Yichang City, Hubei — the Chu capital probably moved to Jingzhou later), was taken only ten days after the battle, on 29 November. Wu Zixu exhumed the body of King Ping and gave it 300 lashes in revenge for the execution of his father and brother and forcing him to flee. Wu Zixu was also promoted to Duke of Shen and given the name Shenxu.

Despite their success against Chu, by 473 BC, the State of Wu was defeated by and absorbed into the Kingdom of Yue, who were aided by the weakened Chu. King Helu's son, Fuchai, was the last king of Wu.


CAMPAIGNS OF WU & CHU, LEADING TO THE BATTLE OF BOJU, 506 B.C.
LEGEND
Initial Wu movements (Chu in yellow)
Subsequent Wu movements (Chu in yellow)
Penultimate Wu movements (Chu in yellow)
Final Wu movements
Battle / Skirmish
YING (CHU CAPITAL)
7. Shen Yinshu attempts to trap Helu's army in a pincer movement, crossing the Dabie Mountains to subsequently give battle
River Han
Dabie Mountains
1. Helu's march south to the eastern bank of the River Han
8. Battle of Yongshi
2. Nang Wa's advance to the western bank of the River Han and pursuit, leading to the Battle of Boju
6. Battle at the Qingfa River (final destruction of Nang Wa's army)
Dabie Mountains
5. Battle of Boju
Dabie Mountains
YING
9. Helu's victorious advance to the Chu capital of Ying
3. Skirmish at the River Han
4. Helu's strategic retreat and subsequent stand at the Battle of Boju

As for Sun Tzu, it was soon the accepted story that he had proven the tenets of his *Art of War* treatise to King Helu and then took part in the Battle of Boju. The biography of Sima Qian, however, only briefly summarises Sun Tzu's involvement stating that, once appointed to command Wu forces, he defeated Chu in the west "and forced his way into Ying, the capital; to the north he put fear into the States of Qi and Qin, and spread his fame abroad amongst the feudal princes. And Sun Tzu shared in the might of the King". His existence at the time and his involvement in Wu's fortunes are still matters for debate. AW

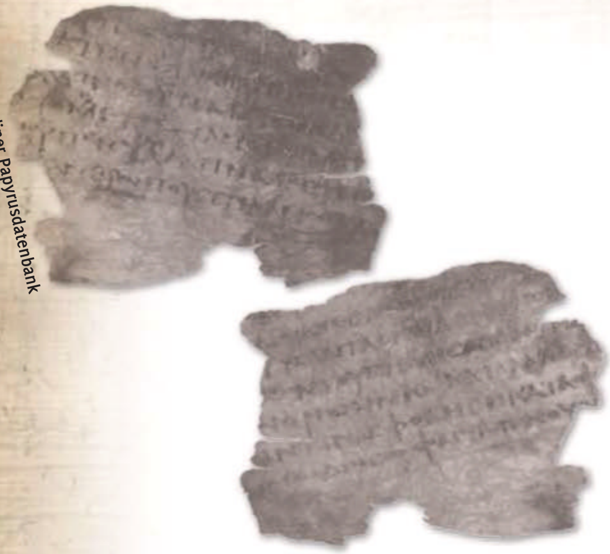
Murray is the assistant editor of* Ancient Warfare *magazine.

(*Top*) Chariot and four-horse burial from Luoyang, the ancient capital of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–256 BC).
© Windmemories / Wikimedia Commons

(*Centre*) The movements of the Wu and Chu armies before and after the battle of Boju, November 506 BC.
© Richard Thomson

(*Bottom*) Eastern Zhou Dynasty bronze dagger-axe (*Ge*) with silver inlay. It dates from the Warring States Period but was common in earlier periods as well.
© Art Institute of Chicago

Sword from the tomb of King Helu with an inscription on the blade that reads "Made for the personal use of lord Guang of Wu" (Helu's name before he assumed the throne).
© 怪怪～鱼 / Wikimedia Commons



© Berliner Papyrusdatenbank

Papyrus P. 16355 contains sections of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (2, 4, 22–23, 26–27), a text which was considered one of the most important texts for leadership.

TEXTS TO HELP TRAIN YOUR COMMANDERS

READ YOUR WAY TO VICTORY

In the earliest issues of *AW* (I.1-III.6), I was lucky enough to pen a series of articles on the genre of didactic military literature. In an issue themed around commanders, now seems like the perfect time to briefly revisit such a subject. What is more, since we look at several subjects from ancient China in this issue, it is also the perfect opportunity to explore the parallels in this field between the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and ancient China.

By Murray Dahm

The most quoted (and misquoted) ancient work on warfare is the *Art of War*, a treatise attributed to Sun Tzu or Sunzi (ca. 544-496 BC) who lived at the close of the Spring and Autumn Period (771-481 BC). It remains a much-studied and highly influential work, as applicable to modern warfare in the east and west as it is to ancient warfare, and not to mention to modern business practices! The treatise is, however, often entirely misunderstood or taken out of context to suit various purposes.

Often called the oldest military treatise in the world, the *Art of War* probably post-dates the life of Sun Tzu. It was more likely written during the Warring States Period (ca. 475-221 BC). *The Art of War* mentions weapons like the crossbow — not used widely in battle until the Warring States Period, — as well as tenets of Taoist philosophy which were not yet written when Sun Tzu lived, and events which had not yet occurred in the late-sixth century BC. There are other Chinese military treatises which predate the *Art of War*, but none gained the fame or notoriety of Sun Tzu's treatise and several are lost entirely.

The *Art of War* contains thirteen chapters with multiple sub-sections which examine the essential tenets of the art of war. The chapters explore weapons, terrain and environment, morale and discipline, formation and manoeuvre, and wider strategic considerations including the use of intelligence and spies. It should come as no surprise that such a treatise (and, indeed, treatises) were popular at a time when war was ubiquitous. In the eleventh century AD, during the Song Dynasty, the *Art of War* was included in *The Seven Military Classics*, a collection which included six other works from various periods considered essential to understanding warfare. Most of these treatises were composed during the Warring States Period: Jiang Ziya (Taigong)'s *Six Secret Teachings*, *The Methods of the Sima*, Wu Qi's *Wuzi*, and *Wei Liaozi*. The *Three Strategies of Huang Shigong* may date to slightly later and the *Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong* dates from after the seventh century AD.

Western counterparts

At almost the same time as the *Art of War* was perhaps actually being written, the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) was raging in Greece. The dialogues of Plato reveal that there was a widespread appetite in Greece at the time for military sophists (the *hoplomachoi*), hired to teach young men the art of command. Although this was done verbally, and usually supplemented with the idea that you should read your Homer since he was considered the source of all knowledge, it was not long before the Greeks began to codify such knowledge and write treatises of their own. Although they have never attained the respect with which ancient Chinese texts (especially Sun Tzu) are treated and are often more focused in subject, this tradition began a genre of didactic military literature which stretched, unbroken, into the medieval period and beyond. Indeed, it is still with us. It also reflected a movement to write handbook treatises on all manner of other subjects.

Perhaps the first military treatises in the Greek world were the *Cavalry Commander* by Xenophon and the many treatises by Aeneas the Tactician. Only one of the latter's works has come down to us (*How to Survive Under Siege*), but he records several other works he had already written by the 350s and he may have written up to eight treatises: *Preparations*, *War Finance* or *Procurement*, *Admonitions* or *Addresses*, *Naval Tactics*, *Encampments*, *Strategy*, and possibly a *Tactica*. In his surviving treatise, Aeneas advises the reader on everything they might need to consider in order to successfully survive a siege; Xenophon explores what qualities and skills are necessary to command a unit cavalry – it was perhaps written for his sons who were both officers in the cavalry. Several other treatises may be older; a *Hoplomachion* treatise is attributed to the philosopher Democritus of Abdera written in the late-fifth or early-fourth century BC (Diogenes Laertius 9.48).

Teaching takes off

From the time of Alexander the Great, we find an explosion of military treatises — all didactic in nature, seeking to teach the reader how to draw up armies just like the victorious Macedonians — the idea being that if you could draw up an army like them, you would be victorious like them. Thus, we find lists of the many *Tactica* treatises aimed at telling the reader how to draw up the phalanx. These began with the works of Cineas the Thessalian at the close of the fourth century and were followed by examples by Pyrrhus of Epirus and many others, including the commander and historian Polybius of Megalopolis. The earliest surviving of these treatises (by Asclepiodotus) comes from c. 50 BC, however, and they continued to be written during the Roman empire (by Aelian in c. AD 110 and Arrian in the 130s). Only three survive. These later survivals of the *Tactica* from a period long after the dominance of the Macedonian phalanx, have led to a long (modern) tradition of claiming that they were worthless theoretical and mathematical treatises. The genre was, however, clearly designed to impart to commanders how to draw up armies and other intangibles of waging war; if the genre was considered worthless in antiquity, the treatises written by very respected commanders are hard to explain. *Tactica* treatises continued to be written into the eight century and continued to be considered worthwhile — both in the reading and the writing of them.

Most Greek and Latin treatises are entirely lost but we have tantalising lists of them. They included treatises on warfare in Homer and other topics (all listed in Aelian's *Tactica* 1.1-1.3). There were also *Strategika* treatises, the Greek equivalent of the *Art of War*. In Latin, these were the *De Re Militari*, one by Cato the Elder (234-149 BC) was perhaps the first. Many others are mentioned but the first (and only) one to survive from antiquity is that by Vegetius, dating (probably) to c. AD 383 and the aftermath of the disaster of Adrianople in 378. The early-fifth century writes Johannes Lydus provides a list of others in *De Magistratibus reipublicae Romanae* 1.47 (*On the magistracies of the Roman state*), including one by the remarkable first-century general Sextus Julius Frontinus. He, in fact, refers to it in his own collection of stratagems, the *Strategemata*, a kind of appendix to the earlier (lost) *De Re Militari*. Such collections of military anecdotes were also common and were intended to teach the reader how to command armies as well, based on how armies in the past had been commanded. Unfortunately, only two examples survive — Frontinus' and that by Polyaenus of Macedon. Polyaenus was a rhetor and advocate at the court of Marcus Aurelius and so his collection is abused as pointless literature, but he too records that the genre he wrote in was intended to communicate the art of command. What is more, we know his work was read by the emperors and it continued to be considered valuable into the tenth century and beyond. We also have *The General* by a philosopher named Onasander who wrote it specifically for a man about to embark on his governorship of Britain, Quintus Veranius, who died in the province in AD 59.

In all, less than twenty of these Greek and Latin treatises survive — if we add those which survive from other cultures, we double that number. All provide tantalising clues about the approaches to warfare in the ancient world, some of which cross cultures but others of which are peculiar and culture-specific. Most are relatively short and well worth your time – who knows, they may even inspire you to explore different aspects of ancient warfare.

***Murray Dahm is the assistant editor of* Ancient Warfare.**

FURTHER READING

- Dahm, M. (2024). 'The Chronology and Contexts of Greek Tactica', in Olivier Devillers and Breno Battistin Sebastiani (eds.) *Sources et modèles des historiens anciens*, 3 (Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions), pp. 9-50.
- Dahm, M. (2020). 'The Lost Tactica of Lucius Papirius Paetus', in James Chlup and Conor Whately (eds.) *Greek and Roman Military Manuals: Genre, Theory, Influence* (London: Routledge), pp. 172-182.

THE DARKER SIDE OF THE ROMAN CENTURION

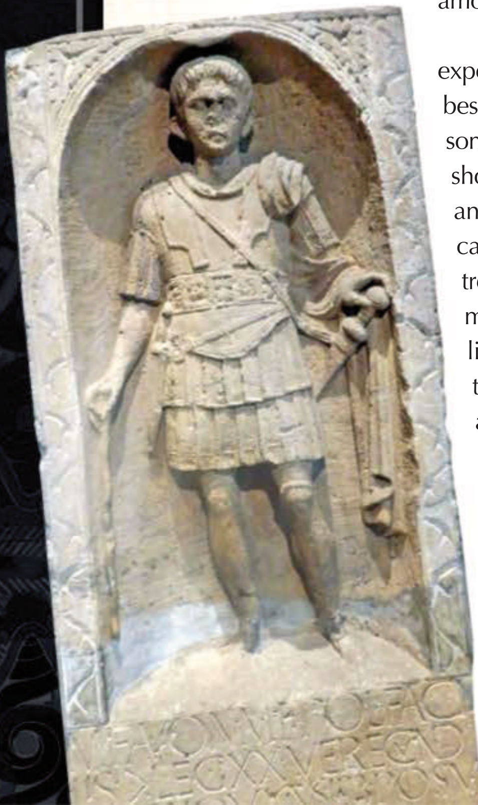
By Jo Ball

CENTURIONS BEHAVING BADLY

A bronze Roman shield boss (*umbo*) from Britain, early second century AD. The '>' symbol in the inscription denotes that it belonged to a man who was in the *centuria* led by Julius Magnus.
© Sergio Geijo / Flickr

The discipline of the Roman army is frequently commented on in both ancient and modern accounts, often credited as a significant contributor to its military success, particularly in combat. Centurions, too, are often credited as a major factor in instilling and maintaining this vital discipline among the soldiers under their command. But how did centurions themselves behave when off the battlefield — and did they hold themselves to the same high standards as we think that they held their soldiers?

Centurions were a key part of the Imperial Roman army. As well as being excellent fighters in their own right, centurions were chosen for their ability to lead and command, to exercise self-control, and for their efficiency and effectiveness both on and off the battlefield. In many ways, they are presented as the epitome of what a Roman soldier could — and should — have been. The reality is far more complex. Many centurions may have ended up in that position due to their personal connections or having bought the position. The Emperor Hadrian was praised for the fact that during his reign only those who deserved to be centurions were selected for the role, however, which means that centurion status was often not actually a meritocracy. While undoubtedly many centurions did possess some or all the ideal characteristics and were effective leaders of their men, they were not always self-disciplined nor necessarily popular among the soldiers under their command.



The tombstone of Marcus Favonius Facilis, centurion of the Twentieth Legion, from the first century AD. His *vitis* (vine branch), features prominently, identifying him as a centurion.
© Colchester Museum

Ordinary Roman soldiers might have expected their centurions to have had their best long-term interests at heart, even if that sometimes manifested in negative ways in the short-term, such as brutal, repetitive training and maintaining strict discipline. In many cases, however, centurions seem to have treated the soldiers under their command more badly than anticipated, pushing the limits of what their men could tolerate. Centurions occupied a position of authority in a system which was open to the abuse of power, both against lower-ranking soldiers and any civilians they came into contact with. Many took advantage of their situation, using their authority to assault soldiers and civilians alike, extort money from their men, and to break the law with impunity and without fear of recrimination. Many of their actions ultimately represented institutional corruption, allowing centurions to indulge their desires for both violence and money.

Military discipline

There is no doubt that discipline in the Roman army could be enforced harshly when necessary. The historian Polybius provides some insight into the severity of military punishments in the Republican army, and there is no suggestion that the situation become more relaxed in the Imperial period. Soldiers could be stoned or flogged, potentially to death, for a range of indiscretions, including falling asleep on sentry duty, theft from the camp, giving false evidence, or if you had been punished for a more minor infraction three times (Polybius, Histories 6.37.8–11). Although these punishments might seem brutal today, the Roman military authorities evidently felt that they were necessary to instil discipline in their conscripted soldiers, many of whom would have had little or no prior experience. More recent research into the Roman army has suggested, however, that such harsh discipline may have been phased out in the early Imperial period, as it became less relevant to the professionalized army of the emperors.

With the foundation of a career army in place of the temporary conscription force of the Republican period, soft power became more relevant to Roman military authorities. Soldiers increasingly maintained discipline not just through fear of punishment, but as a result of

Bronze name tag (*tabula ansata*) found at Castellum Albaniana (Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands). The text may record the name of the centurion (or that of his *centuria*) L. Patricius Sabinus.
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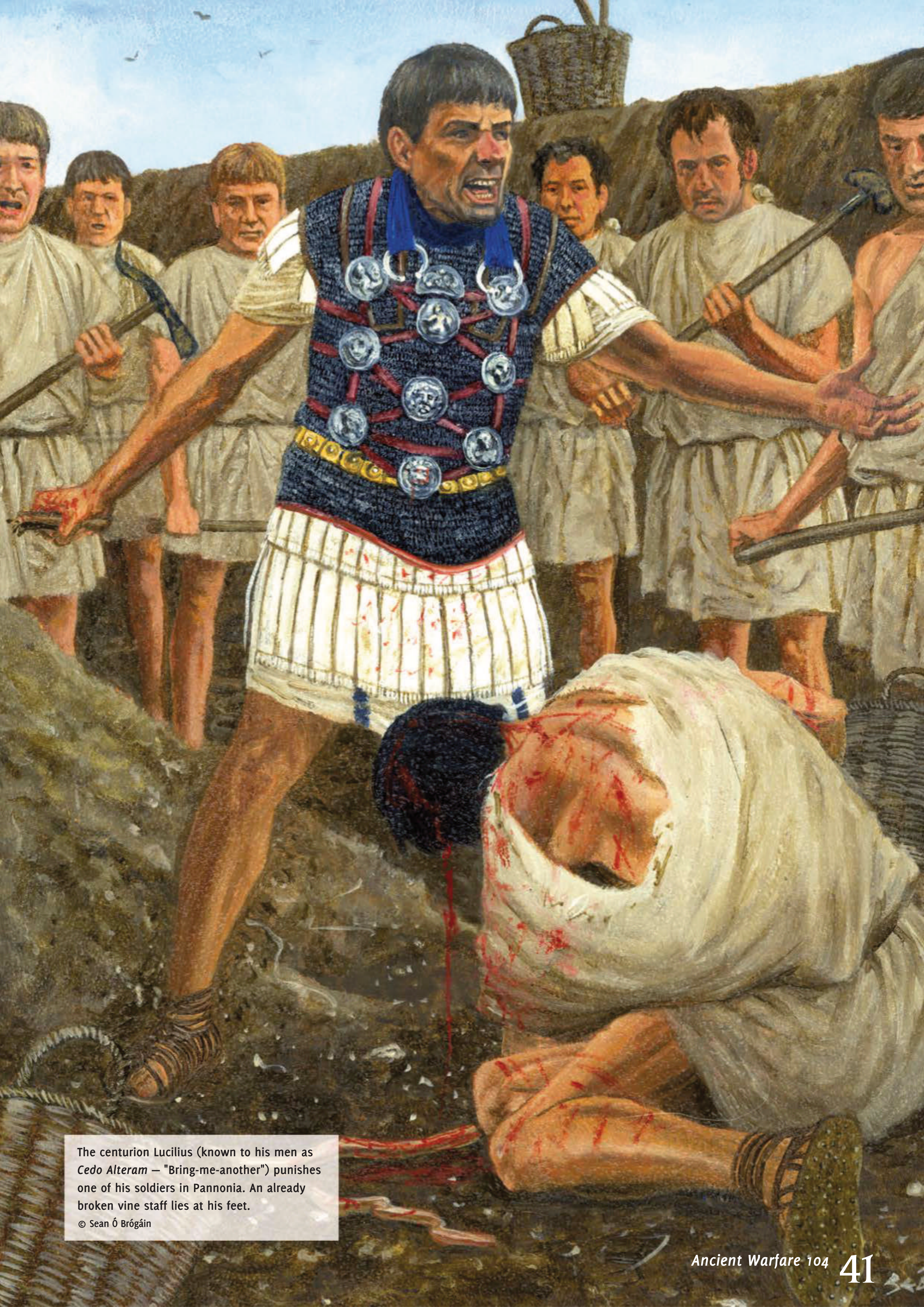
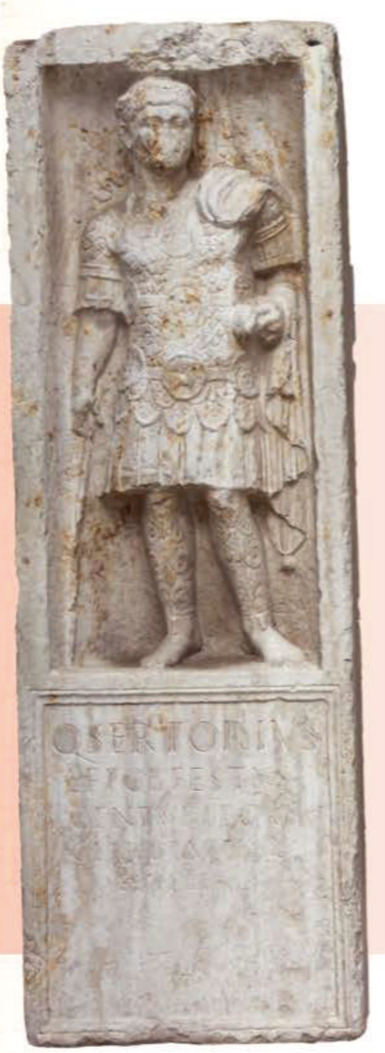


The centurion Lucilius (known to his men as *Cedo Alteram* — "Bring-me-another") punishes one of his soldiers in Pannonia. An already broken vine staff lies at his feet.
© Sean Ó Brógáin

Portrait bust of Germanicus, who dealt with a revolt by the German legions at the same time as the Pannonian Revolt in AD 14.
© Carole Raddato / Wikimedia Commons



The tombstone of the centurion Quintus Sertorius Festus from Verona — note the similarity of the pose and presence of the *vitis* to the memorial of Marcus Favonius Facilis on the previous page.
© Dimitriy Feldman / Shutterstock

the social bonds between themselves and their comrades, and their officers. Peer pressure and a desire not to let your friends down combined to produce high levels of discipline on and off the battlefield. These bonds within the soldiery are probably one major reason why punishments such as decimation were ultimately abandoned in the Imperial period, as the impact on morale from the random collective punishment of close comrades became more negative than the discipline it hoped to instil.

However, the fact that discipline no longer had to be (exclusively) reinforced through punishment does not mean that such actions went away. Harsh treatment of soldiers by centurions persisted into the Imperial era. While soldiers were generally unable to argue against such actions, at times they evidently felt that disciplinary measures inflicted by centurions could be too harsh, crossing beyond the boundaries of what they were willing to tolerate.

An excess of discipline

One infamous example is the centurion Lucilius, who was part of a legion stationed on the Pannonian frontier in the early first century AD. Lucilius was better known to his men by his nickname of ‘*Cedo Alteram*’ (“Bring-me-another”), due to his habit of breaking his centurion’s vine-staff while beating a soldier and calling for another one, and ultimately, a third (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.23). There is no clue about what the soldiers had done to receive such punishment — or whether it was not just Lucilius beating them in this way because he wanted to and he could. Either way, the soldiers clearly felt he had overstepped the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In AD 14, some of the Pannonian legions mutinied after the death of Augustus, and one of their first actions was to kill Lucilius.

Lucilius’ death was not part of a general cull of centurions during this mutiny, although they do seem to have been a particular focus of discontent at the time. Several others were killed when they could not get away. In some cases, opinion was divided over which centurions should be killed and which left alive; one, named Sirpicus, had his execution demanded by the men of *Legio VIII*, but he was protected by those of *Legio XV*, and with the men of *Legio IX* ultimately calming the situation down. The focus of the men’s anger on their centurions in AD 14 suggests that they were identified as part of the ‘enemy’ officer class rather than comrades and potentially held responsible for all discontent associated with the military institution, not just their own actions.

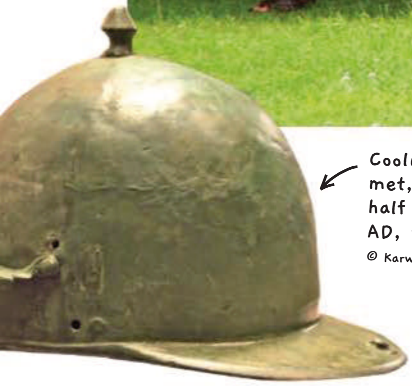
It was not just in Pannonia in AD 14 that centurions found themselves the target of mutinying soldiers. In AD 69, a mutiny by the seventeenth cohort of the Praetorian Guard saw the soldiers kill the strictest of their centurions — presumably, those who had treated them most harshly. In late AD 79, soldiers in Britain rebelled for unknown reasons, and killed their centurions as well as a military tribune. The historical record refers to many other minor mutinies without further details, and it can be im-

The centurion as leader

Many centurions were promoted from the ranks. They started off as ordinary soldiers (*gregales* — *"from the herd"*) and worked their way up the system, rather than coming in as a distant officer class. Centurions provided a link between the strategic command at the top of the legion and the men who would be required to carry out the orders given. It was a rank that many were proud of attaining, with the symbols of their status — especially the vine-staff that only centurions were allowed to carry — often featuring in the funerary imagery of their tombstones. It also came with a much higher rate of pay, and better service conditions.

One of the primary tasks of the centurion was to prepare his soldiers for the chaos of the battlefield, ensuring that they were sufficiently disciplined to perform effectively in combat. Declining discipline was a complaint often levelled against the Roman army, particularly whenever they had an extended break from campaigning — the common complaint being that they became over-used to the ‘luxury’ of the camp and would underperform in battle as a result. Centurions were a key part of this process, setting the standards expected of their men, and there could be significant variation in how harsh they were — potentially with some ruling through fear of punishment, others through example or the social relationship they had with their soldiers.

Like his sword, the centurion might also use the *vitis* to signal his troops and coordinate their movements, as demonstrated here by this modern reenactment.
© Karwansaray Publishers



Coolus-type bronze helmet, dated to the first half of the first century AD, from the Rhineland.
© Karwansaray Publishers

agined that many centurions fell in these uprisings.

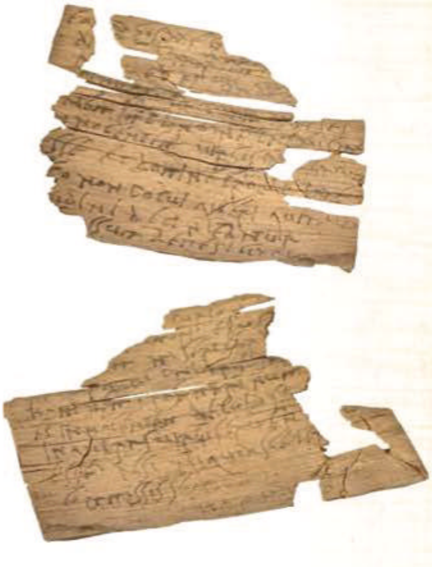
Why were centurions targeted in the early stages of mutiny? Given what is known about their sometimes-harsh imposition of discipline and punishment, these killings can be seen as soldiers lashing out at hated figures who had abused their power in the past. Or were centurions simply the most easily accessible victims of general anger towards the military authorities? The targeting of centurions does seem to reflect genuine anger from the soldiers — but killing centurions also rapidly removed the people most likely to be able to stop the mutiny in its early stages. As such, it may have been recognized as desirable to get centurions out of the way as soon as possible.

Bribes and bullying

It was not just in the context of violence that centurions could allow their behaviour to wander. Financial matters also caused discontent among the soldiers under their command. One of the key ways in which centurions abused their power was to extort payments from lower-ranking soldiers to secure day-to-day privileges. Payment could be demanded by centurions for a range of military rights and privileges, from grants of furlough to being excused from hard labour around the camp. Soldiers who came from a wealthier background and initially refused to pay the bribes would deliberately be put on the harshest duties until they gave in. Many soldiers turned to petty theft and highway robbery to find the cash to pay the centurion for easier duties — clearly, discipline was not to be maintained under all circumstances. This was despite the fact that centurions likely earned at least ten times as much as each soldier. It was well known within the army that some centurions would try to supplement their income with bribes from the soldiers under their command. This, too, became a common cause for complaint among the soldiery.

During the Pannonian Mutiny in AD 14, one of the chief complaints of the rebellious troops was the amount of money that was taken from them by centurions to avoid poor treatment. They demanded that an end be put to the bribes that they claimed equated to an unofficial tax on their income — while also arguing that their pay was far too low for the job they

Wooden tablet from Vindolanda recording the complaint of a merchant who was beaten (with a centurion's *vitis*) and who appealed for redress over rough justice, AD 100-200.
© Jamie Heath / Flickr



Bronze plaque with inscription from a wooden chest naming the officer who owned it. He was in the Fifth Legion stationed at Neuss.
© Heiko Fischer / Wikimedia Commons

Bronze scabbard sheath, ca. AD 40–50, discovered in Valkenburg, the Netherlands. It was found under the threshold of a centurion's house.
© Lauren van Zoonen

were actually being asked to do. The same issue became a problem again during the AD 69 civil war, when soldiers raised the problems they had with the bribery of centurions with Galba:

> *"A quarter of each company would be away on furlough or loafing about the camp itself, provided the soldiers paid the centurion his price, and no one cared how the burden pressed on the soldiers or how they got their money"*
> (Tacitus, *Histories* 1.46)

The financial burden of these bribes on ordinary soldiers was recognized by Otho, who ordered that the Imperial treasury would pay for furlough from that point onwards; he could not risk alienating the centurions by simply removing this financial perk. Later that year, Vitellius was forced to make the same financial agreement to avoid losing the fragile loyalty of the centurions; this practice seems to have been continued for long afterwards.

Crime and punishment

It was not just soldiers who could suffer at the hands of avaricious or violent centurions. Soldiers in general enjoyed a certain amount of laxity in the law, which allowed them to mistreat civilians during day-to-day lives. When called upon to judge and impose punishment on them for their actions, centurions often failed to impose the same standards of discipline required between soldiers in the camp. The resulting 'trials' were frequently little more than a sham court, rather than the court martial-type proceedings that might otherwise have been expected.

In Juvenal's *Satires* — a collection of essays which addressed the degeneracy of the Roman world in the early second century AD — *satire* 16 characterizes the Roman military as one of the most corrupt and ill-disciplined groups in society, with centurions playing a key role in this process. In the satire, soldiers are alleged to frequently beat up civilians in the streets badly enough that they could be left with missing teeth or even losing the sight in one eye. When this happened, Juvenal advises, it was better to forget the matter rather than try to seek justice, as the soldier would be submitted to a military trial at the hands of a jury of soldiers, overseen by a centurion judge. Even if you were to somehow win your case, any redress would be taken back in a mass beating at the hands and feet of his comrades, which would be worse than the first assault: "… as you possess a pair of legs, you must have a mulish brain … to provoke so many jackboots, and all those thousands of hobnails."

An unfortunate encounter with a centurion also featured in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, the only surviving Roman novel, written in the second century AD, in which a man named Lucius accidentally turns himself into a donkey through poorly-practiced magic. At one point, he witnesses the assault of his rider, a gardener, by a centurion, who was provoked into anger when his demand for identification was refused. The centurion tries to confiscate the donkey, and proceeds to attack the rid-

(Top) **Remains of the Praetorium in Cologne (Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium), where Vitellius was recognized as emperor in AD 69.**
© Archäologische Zone Köln / Wikimedia Commons

(Bottom) **Fresco of Solomon's judgement while soldiers, dressed as contemporary Romans, watch the proceedings.**
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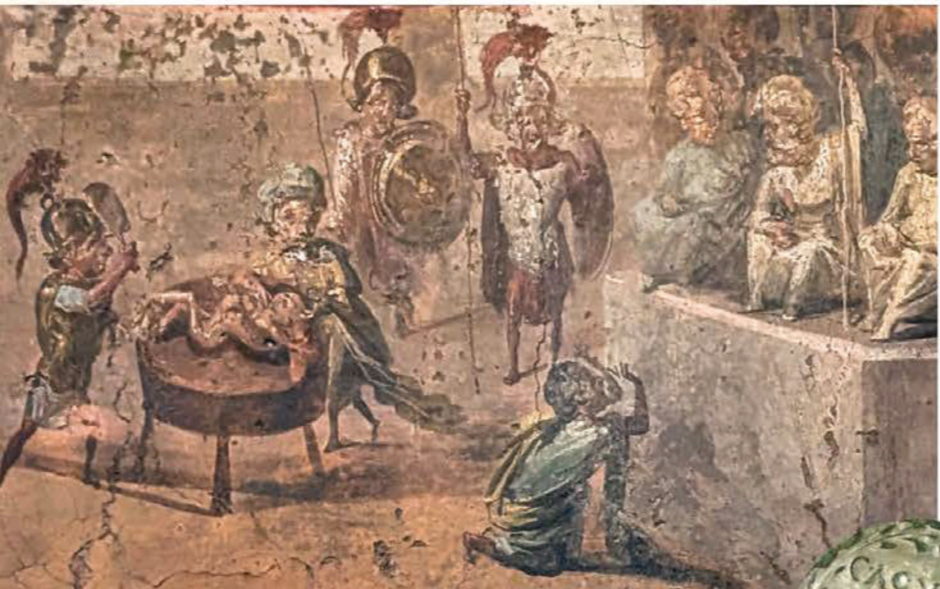

C AQVILLI
PROCVLI
> LEG VIII
AVG

Bronze disc from the Kops Plateau in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Dating to ca. AD 70, it states: "(Property) of Gaius Aquillius Proculus, centurion of the Eighth Augustan Legion".
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Remains of the Temple of the Divine Augustus in Rome; built on the site of the house that Augustus inhabited before he entered public life.

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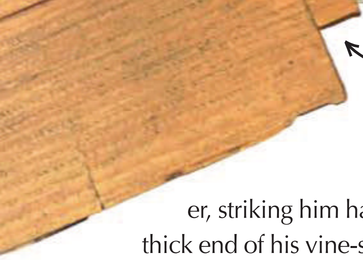

Writing tablet recording a court case on August 4, AD 186, held before the legate of *Legio VIII Augusta*.

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er, striking him hard on the head with the thick end of his vine-staff. The gardener, however, triumphs, feigning falling to his knees to beg for mercy only to pull the centurion's feet from under him and proceeding to beat him on the ground — including with a rock. Apuleius' readers must have delighted in seeing even a fictional centurion be on the losing side of a fight for once — something which was doubtless rare in reality. The story did not end well for the gardener, however. The centurion told his fellow-soldiers what had happened, and they assisted him in trying to frame the gardener for the theft of a non-existent silver jug; the gardener was arrested and dragged off for execution, while the centurion took possession of Lucius-the-donkey.

These literary mistreatments of civilians are backed up by archaeological evidence. A wooden tablet from Vindolanda contains a petition from a merchant asking for redress over an assault he recently suffered at the hands of a soldier (see *AW* XIV.2). He claimed that he had been beaten with rods and had his goods poured down the drain by a centurion stationed at the fort. The merchant explains that he has complained to the other centurions in the unit to no effect and, therefore, wants to take his appeal to a higher authority. What the result of the appeal was we do not know, although the fact that this paperwork ended up in a rubbish dump at the fort might provide a clue (assuming it was not superseded by a later draft). The merchant specifically mentioned that he came from overseas — did the fact that he would soon leave the area mean that he felt more confident in taking on the local soldiery?

At their best, centurions were an admirable part of the Imperial Roman army, training and disciplining the men under their command to become one of the most formidable military forces in history. But there was a darker side to them, which saw centurions abusing their power and status, both within the army and with civilians, confident that justice was unlikely to catch up with them. Expected to be great leaders on the battlefield, centurions certainly had their darker side in everyday life. AW

Jo Ball is a regular contributor to **Ancient Warfare** *magazine.*

Funerary stele of Marcus Caelius, Primus Pilus of *Legio XVIII*. Caelius died at the age of 53 during the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in September AD 9.

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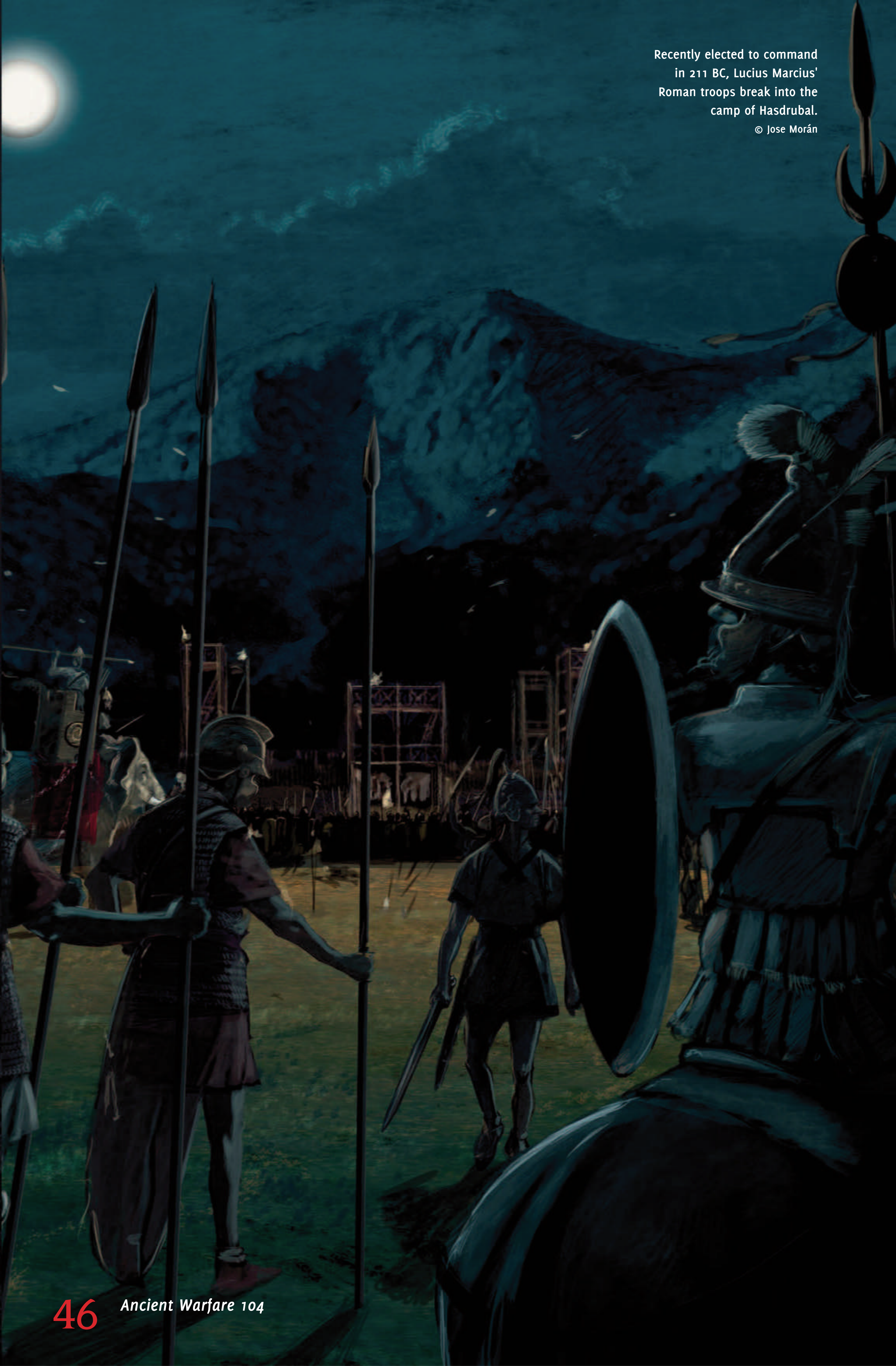

Recently elected to command in 211 BC, Lucius Marcius' Roman troops break into the camp of Hasdrubal.
© Jose Morán

LUCIUS MARCIUS AND THE DISASTER IN SPAIN

By Fred K. Drogula

FLEXIBLE OFFICERS

The Roman Republic survived several disasters that threatened its existence, but few were as critical as the sudden destruction of two of its armies in Spain in 211 BC. In that year, Rome was still reeling from a series of military disasters inflicted upon it by Hannibal Barca. The loss of these armies opened a route for Carthaginian reinforcements to reach Hannibal in Italy, putting the very future of Rome into question.

When the Second Punic War began in 218 BC, Hannibal stunned the Romans by leading his army in a rapid march from Spain, through southern France, over the Alps, and into northern Italy. Despite being greatly outnumbered by the Romans and their allies, he succeeded in utterly crushing them in four successive battles, including the disastrous Battle of Cannae in 216 BC. After such staggering losses, Fabius Maximus 'the Delayer' developed a new strategy (for the Romans) of shadowing Hannibal's movements, avoiding battles but preventing him from gaining resources or capturing Italian cities (see Ray, *AW* XVI.4). While the Romans appeared incapable of defeating Hannibal and pushing him out of Italy, Fabius Maximus' strategy limited his ability to capitalize on his many victories.

Disaster and recovery

This was a disastrous time, and Hannibal was holding his knife at Rome's throat, but the Romans had one key advantage: Carthage was not able to reinforce Hannibal and provide him with the men and supplies he desperately needed. Rome had enjoyed naval superiority in the western Mediterranean ever since the end of the First Punic War, so its fleets were able to prevent the Carthaginians from sending reinforcements to Hannibal by sea. The only other supply route was overland from Spain, following the same path Hannibal had taken in his invasion of Italy. Yet this route was blocked by a powerful Roman army under the command of Publius Cornelius Scipio, who was ably assisted by his older brother, Gnaeus, who was serving as Publius' legate. The Scipio brothers had been sent to Spain at the start of the war in 218 BC, and while they arrived too late to prevent Hannibal's march to Italy, they had been very successful in blocking the land routes and keeping Hannibal's reinforcements trapped in Spain. Three Carthaginian armies under the command of Hannibal's brothers and relatives were desperately trying to punch through the Roman forces to get to Hannibal, but the two Scipio brothers had held the line and were even taking territory away from the Carthaginians.

Disaster struck the Romans in 211 BC. The Scipio brothers had gone on the offensive, dividing their army into two forces and advancing deep into Carthaginian territory. Unfortunately, their local Celtiberian allies betrayed them, allowing them to march into traps set by the Carthaginians. First, Publius was killed along with the bulk of his soldiers, and a few days later the Carthaginians defeated and killed his brother Gnaeus and most of his soldiers. The Romans who survived these disasters scattered, perhaps hoping to escape back to Italy or disappear into the Spanish hills. Rome's entire position in Spain seemed lost, and even worse, the land route to Italy now lay open. There was nothing to prevent Carthage from funnelling reinforcements to Hannibal, with which he would have a good chance of destroying the Roman Republic.

The situation was salvaged by one Roman: Lucius Marcius. His rank or status in the army is unclear — some sources suggest he was a centurion or a military tribune, but others say he was simply an equestrian, by which they meant he was a young man from a prosperous family who was serving in the cavalry or the infantry as a private soldier, something which was normal for young men before embarking on a political career. Marcius had probably joined Publius Scipio's army at the start of the war in 218 BC, but nothing is known about him until 211 BC, when he was serving under the command of Gnaeus Scipio when their army was attacked and destroyed. After the disaster, he appears to have taken the initiative in seeking out other survivors from both armies and bringing them together into a single force. They were being hunted by the victorious Carthaginians, and Marcius seems to have led these men back to a stronghold the Scipio brothers had built during their advance into enemy territory.

Imperium and military authority

The Roman soldiers used their brief reprieve to review their situation and choose a new leader. We are told that they rotated sentry duty on the walls of the fort to allow each man to cast his own vote. This was an unprecedented event that sheds valuable light on Roman concepts of command authority and on the roles and authority of military officers. In normal practice, Roman armies were led by a single commander-in-chief, usually a consul or praetor, who had been elected by the people in the centuriate assembly, and had been invested with *imperium* by a law passed by the curiate assembly. *Imperium* was the absolute authority to command otherwise-free citizen-soldiers, and so it included the capacity to give orders and compel obedience, including the ability to scourge or even execute disobedient soldiers (see also Ballard, elsewhere in this issue).

Each army was given a junior magistrate (a quaestor) to perform the duties of quartermaster, and each legion usually had six officers called military tribunes, who commanded detachments of units, and sixty centurions. A consul or praetor might also invite personal friends to accompany him as informal advisors (*amici*), and he might ask some to serve in the capacity of lieutenant (*legatus*). Yet none of these officers possessed military authority (*imperium*) — only the commander-in-chief was invested with that authority by the state. This meant that, within a Roman army, all command authority flowed from the single appointed commander. In modern armies, in contrast, each officer is invested with the command authority appropriate to their rank, creating a fixed hierarchy and a clear chain of command that determines who assumes command in the absence of the senior-most officer.

When the army was away from Rome and operating in the military sphere (what the Romans called *militiae*), all military authority rested in the commander-in-chief who was invested with *imperium*. No other officer in his army possessed *imperium*, so if the commander-in-chief suddenly died, no one had the legal authority to assume command. When a commander-in-chief anticipated his absence from his army for any reason (including his own pending death), he was usually careful to use his *imperium* to order one of his officers (usually his quaestor or a legate) to exercise command in his absence. It was, therefore, quite common for a consul to order his quaestor or legate to act *pro praetore*, which in Latin meant to act "as if he was a commander" or "in place of a commander" (the word *praetor* was both the generic word for 'commander' as well as the title of a specific magistracy). Many scholars of Roman history believe that, in such cases, the commander conferred *imperium* upon his officer, much like the modern concept of a battlefield promotion, in which an officer promotes a soldier to a higher rank. Yet this is unlikely to have been the case in the Roman army.

No source of authority in ancient Rome was so carefully and precisely controlled as *imperium*: it could only be conferred upon a man in Rome through the passage of a law by the curiate assembly (a *lex curiata*), and before he could activate and use his *imperium*, he was required to perform a series of rituals while exiting the city to take command of his army. Ancient historians report many stories of consuls who, for one reason or another, neglected to receive a *lex curiata* or who neglected to perform the requisite rituals when leaving the city, and in all cases the soldiers and junior officers in his army refused to recognize his authority. Given these extensive controls on the conferral of *imperium*, it seems impossible that consuls could simply give it away to as many lieutenants as they wished simply with a word. That would be like a modern general making another man a general through a battlefield promotion — such a thing does not happen because the highest ranks in armies are only conferred by the state. Instead, a commander with *imperium* ordered one of his officers to act *pro praetore*, and so that officer was simply carrying out the order, which was binding even in the commander's absence. So, the consul used his *imperium* to tell a subordinate how to act in his absence, and that order gave the subordinate all the authority he needed to carry out the consul's instructions. Thus, ordering a Roman officer to act *pro praetore* was not a battlefield promotion and did not invest an officer with a new level or type of authority, but instead it instructed the officer on what actions he should undertake as one subordinate to the consul's *imperium*. In this respect, it was closer to what happens when the captain of a naval vessel orders an officer to take command of the bridge in the captain's absence: the officer takes operational control of the ship and performs the responsibilities of the captain but is not promoted to captain. So, Roman consuls would normally ensure continuity of command by designating an officer to assume operational control in his absence, not by investing an officer with *imperium*.

Exceptional command

What makes the Roman disaster in Spain in 211 BC so exceptional is that Publius

Scipio — the commander-in-chief of the Roman army in Spain – died so suddenly that he apparently did not have time to order an officer to act *pro praetore*, or if he did, that officer did not survive either. We know this because, once Marcius had gathered the survivors and brought them together in a Roman fort, the men realized that they no longer had anyone authorized to act as their commander, and so they held an election to choose a commander to lead them. This is remarkable because one of the survivors Marcius found and brought to the camp was Tiberius Fonteius, who had been a legate in Publius Scipio's army. Fonteius had been left in charge of Publius Scipio's camp on the fateful day that the proconsul was killed, but despite being an aristocrat and the commander's lieutenant, he did not have the authority to take command of the survivors. If he had possessed that authority, the election for a new commander would not have been necessary. But as it was, the soldiers knew that no one among them held the authority to command — not the legate Fonteius, nor the equestrian Marcius, nor any military tribunes or centurions who had survived. The soldiers voted for Marcius as their leader, picking a private soldier over any of the appointed officers. This shows us that the Roman military did not have a modern chain of command or any hierarchy of command authority — with the sudden death of the commander-in-chief, no one had the authority to command, and the soldiers could select their new leader. If they had been closer to Rome, a new commander could have been quickly dispatched, but even on their own they could continue to operate effectively.

Naturally, the soldiers did not have the ability to confer *imperium* or legal command authority on Marcius – only the citizen assemblies in Rome could do that. The Roman historian Livy wrote that the soldiers conferred the highest *imperium* on Marcius, but caution is needed. In Latin, the word *imperium* carried many meanings: it could mean the military authority of a commander, but it could also mean an 'empire' or even the vague idea of 'power'. When speaking of Marcius, Livy must simply mean that the soldiers put him in charge despite his technical lack of *imperium*. We know that Marcius did not have any official authority to command, because when he wrote the Senate to inform it of the deaths of the Scipio brothers and to tell it that he had been placed in charge by the surviving soldiers, he told the senators that he was acting *pro praetore* or 'as if a commander'. According to Livy, the senators were deeply offended by his use of this important title — Marcius was not a senator nor a member of the ruling elite, so the status-conscious senators resented his use of the aristocratic title. This shows us that Marcius did not have the legal right to call himself *pro praetore* (no consul had ordered him to act thus). The Senate resented the implications of his use of the title, even if they had to acknowledge that he had been responsible for salvaging Rome's position in Spain during a dire national crisis. Marcius may have simply meant to say that he had assumed command, but the senators' reaction shows us that he did not hold the official status of *pro praetore* in their eyes.

Despite not possessing the legal right to command, Marcius proved exceptionally capable, and his leadership not only saved the lives of many Romans, but he was also able to quickly forge them into an effective fighting group. The Carthaginian pursuit force was flush with victory and confident in their superior numbers. When it caught up with the Romans in their fortress, the Carthaginians decided to camp for the night and destroy that remnant of Rome's army the following morning. Marcius did not wait. He organized his men, led them out in a night raid, and took the enemy by complete surprise. He slaughtered the force of pursuers and gained the military initiative. The details are fuzzy, but next he probably fell back on Rome's great fortress at the city of Emporium in north-eastern Spain, which was well fortified and supplied, and well positioned both to communicate with Rome by sea and to block the Carthaginians from marching overland towards Italy. In that critical moment when the route to reinforcing Hannibal with tens of thousands of troops had been opened, Marcius shut it down again. His force was small, but no smart Carthaginian general would begin such a dangerous march to Italy with a capable enemy force in their rear, and Emporium was too strong to capture quickly. Marcius and his men were able to hold out until the Romans could send reinforcements under a new commander, with *imperium*.

Fortunately for them, the Romans selected a man who would become one of Rome's greatest commanders: Publius Cornelius Scipio, the son of the man who had just died in Spain. This younger Scipio would go on to conquer Spain and then take the war into Africa, ultimately defeating Hannibal at the Battle of Zama in 202 BC and acquiring the triumphal nickname Africanus. Scipio must have respected Marcius' accomplishments and kept him on as a senior officer, because Polybius writes that, once Scipio had conquered Spain and was returning to Italy to continue the war effort from there, he left Marcius and a legate named Silanus in command of the Spanish theatre of war until long-term commanders-in-chief could arrive from Rome. This was a signal honour: the Senate had resented Marcius' use of the title *pro praetore* in 211 BC, but in 206 BC, Scipio left Marcius in co-command of Spain, probably *pro praetore*. It was a considerable recognition for a man who had joined the army as a private soldier. After that, Marcius disappears from history. He not only saved Rome in one of its darkest hours, but his actions also provide us with unique evidence for understanding how officers in the Roman army were (and were not) authorized to exercise command. AW

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The La Iguana structure at Los Guachimontones near Teuchitlán, in Mexico is the largest archaeological site of the eponymous culture.

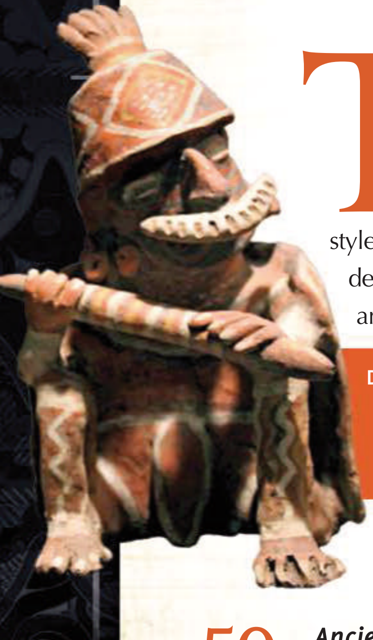
WARRIORS OF IXTLAN AND LA PLAYA

By Velite Aquila

NAKED FURY

In what is now the modern state of Nayarit, Mexico, around two thousand years ago a mysterious culture buried its dead in deep underground tomb shafts. Surrounding the dead were dozens of terracotta vases, offerings, tableaus, and votive warriors. These warriors are among the most unique in Mesoamerica, with tubular body armour, ornamented helmets and distinctive body paint.

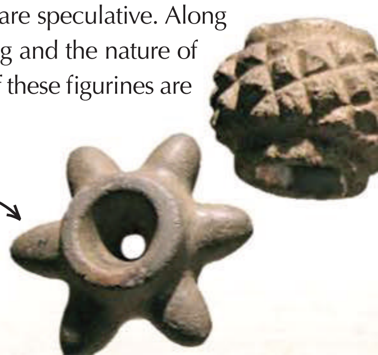
There were many styles of West Mexican Tomb Shaft pottery, yet for this article we will concentrate on the Ixtlan del Rio and La Playa styles, two closely related art styles dated to around AD 200 AD to AD 600. The Ixtlan del Rio ceramic style originated in Southern Nayarit near modern day Ixtlan del Rio made of red clay painted over with white, black and yellow. This style, notably, is dateable to a period of a few hundred years. Both the detail and size of the figurines varies locally, from only tens of centimetres tall to almost half a metre in size. Unfortunately, due to their abundance, many pieces have ended up on the black market.



Distinctive seated warrior terracotta statuette from west Mexico. He carries a club and wears a flat-topped cap with a crest and cape. His body is painted and decorated with piercings.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

The La Playa style is a visually similar style of pottery which can be dated to roughly the same period. It gains its name from the dig site, only around 50 kilometres from Ixtlan del Rio. Though known from fewer figurines, these are typologically better understood as they were found in their original context. Notably, warrior figurines are the most numerous type found at the site. They come in two variants: the seated armoured warriors, which are notably abstract in style, and the crouched nude warriors, depicted in more detail with a shield and one hand, the other arm raised in the act of throwing a stone (Rodriguez, Kraczkowska, 2009).

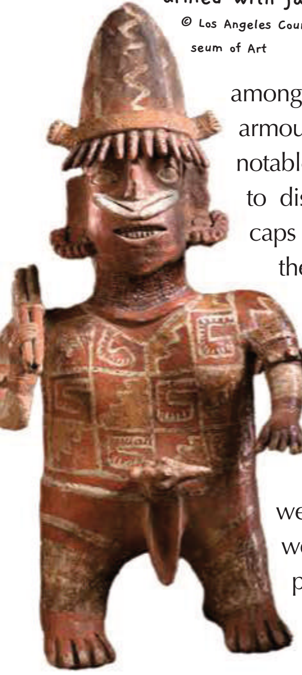
The figurines, once placed to accompany the dead, give an invaluable look into the appearance of the period as unfortunately, little of what is depicted on these statues has survived. However, this inevitably means many of the assumptions raised here are speculative. Along with this, due to looting and the nature of the art market, many of these figurines are



West Mexican stone mace heads which would have been affixed atop wooden shafts.
© Gary Todd / Flickr

unprovenanced and forgeries abound. Yet with careful examination and the use of well provenanced originals, one can reconstruct the appearance of the Nayarita warrior of this period.

The warriors



Warrior figure with a conical hat, piercings, body paint, and armed with javelins.

© Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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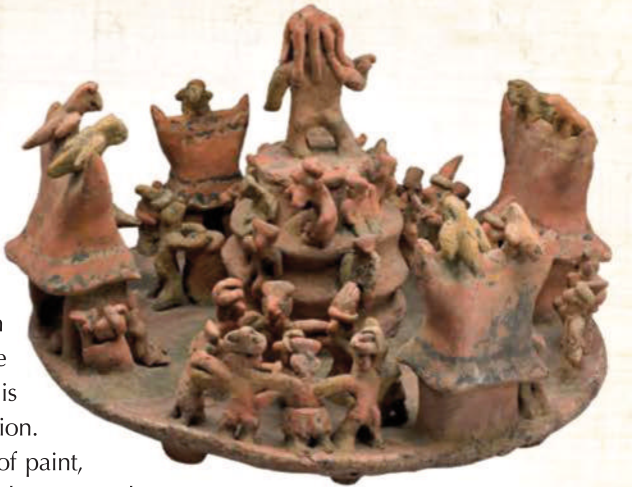
The headdress of these warriors shows great variety and complexity. The conical helmets may have had a wooden structure, held together with colourful, patterned wrapped wool (Berenguer, 2015). These were visually similar to the helmets seen on many of the terracotta warriors, which also featured colourful patterns and designs. The bicorn cap was common among depictions of more heavily armoured warriors. These feature a notable brim which makes it difficult to discern whether these are soft caps or a kind of helmet. Some of the most elaborate of these caps featured animals on top. One figurine from the Regional Museum of Nayarit features a flat top cap with what is likely some sort of canine.

Ear and nose piercings were worn by both men and women. These vary from multiple earrings to earlobe gauges made of sea shell. Multiple nose rings or crescent shaped piercings were common. Necklaces and collars made of the same material were also worn by all. Face painting worn by men was usually adorned with shapes meant to represent cosmological concepts of the sun.

Heavily armed and armoured warriors were depicted wearing large, tubular body armour, that roughly covers a man from his waist up to his shoulders, his arms extending from two holes in the armour. How this was constructed is unknown, but it is speculated that it was made of thick layers of cotton (Rodriguez, Kraczkowska, 2009), similar to *ichcahuipilli*, a sort of gambeson, of Mexica design. Larger, more detailed statues of warriors in this armour represent a solidly shaped tubular design. This could point to some sort of underlying structure with woven or wrapped thread making up the top layer, possibly explaining the patterns on the armour painted on the terracottas.

All of these figurines depict body paint, but what is difficult to see is that many of these pieces have a thin black glazing atop the whole figurine. This easily fades and is often lost with time or restoration. This could represent a layer of paint, similar to modern Nayarit body paint traditions, in which the whole body is covered in black body paint with geometric patterns and designs added with in colour. The terracotta figurines feature similar body patterns, possibly pointing towards the continuation of this tradition for over 2000 years (Jáuregui, 2004).

These warriors, apart from body armour, were often depicted nude, with their arms, legs and genitals exposed. In rare cases they were depicted wearing some sort of loincloth, but oddly enough, clothing was more commonly seen on non-warrior figurines. This could either point to a tradition of artistic heroic nudity, representation of male fertility or genuine depictions of a preference for combat in the nude.



Terracotta model of a ritual centre – note the houses, worshippers (the dancing circle) and the figure in the centre.

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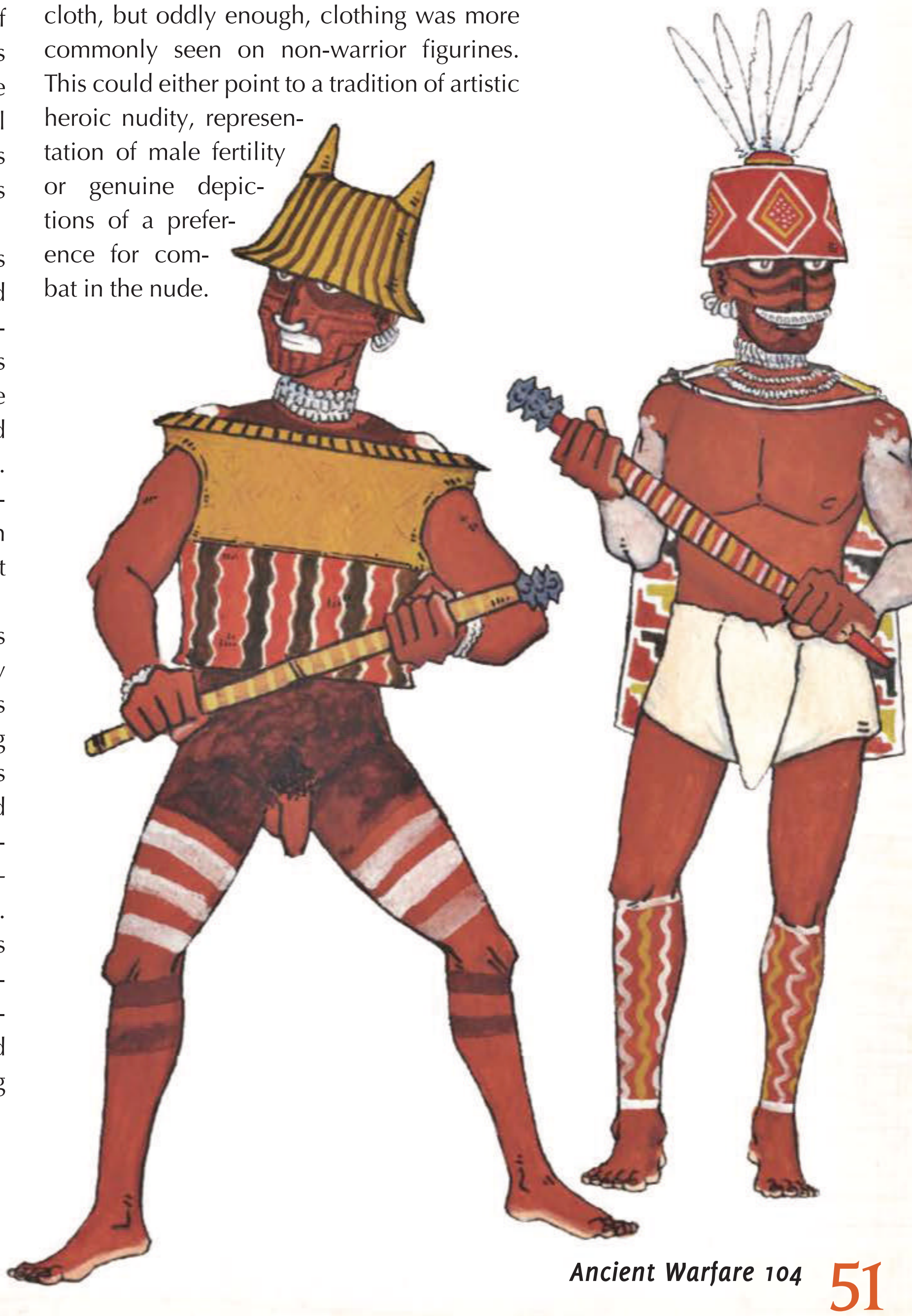

The most commonly depicted weapon in the tomb shaft culture is the mace or club. The mace was likely also a symbol of power for the upper classes.

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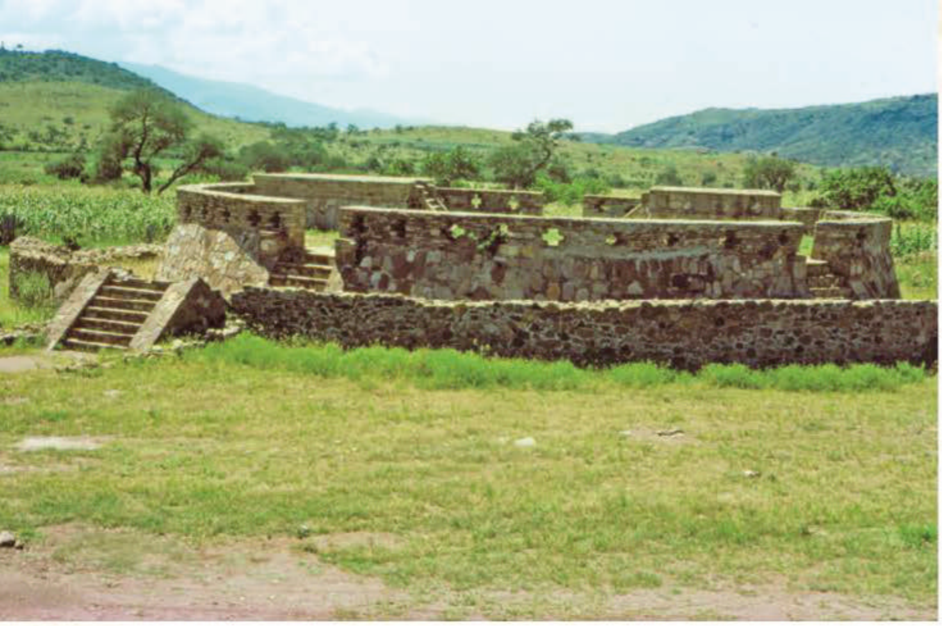

Temple structure at Ixtlan del Rio, Nayarit. Shaft tombs at the site are a distinctive feature of Nayarit culture.

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A common motif in La Playa warrior statues consists of depictions of nude, seated warriors with conical headwear and an arm raised with a stone in hand. Small patterned rectangular shields are their only protection.

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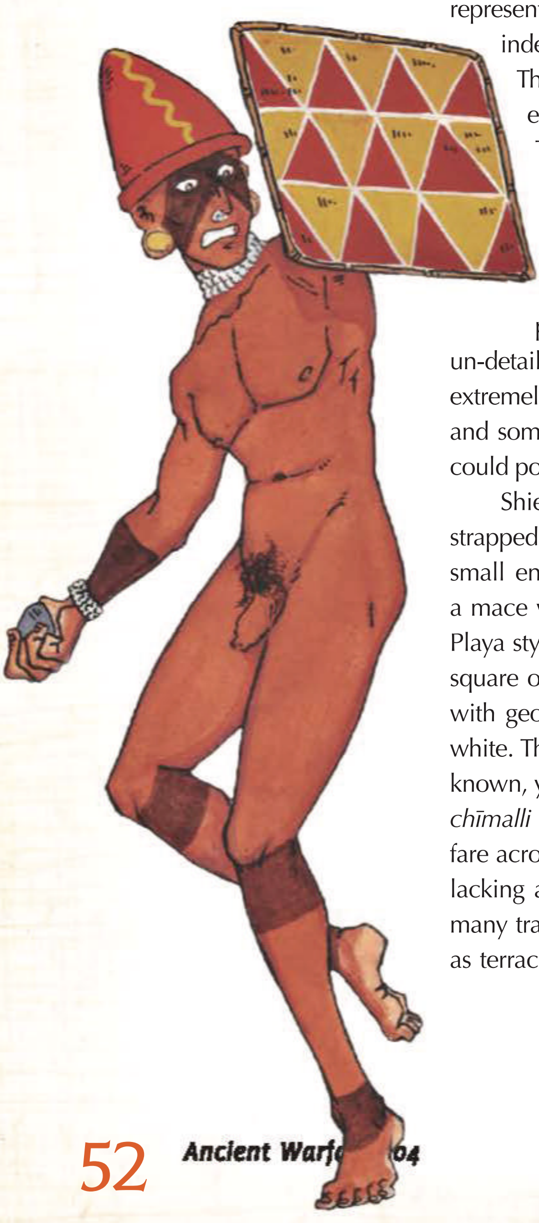
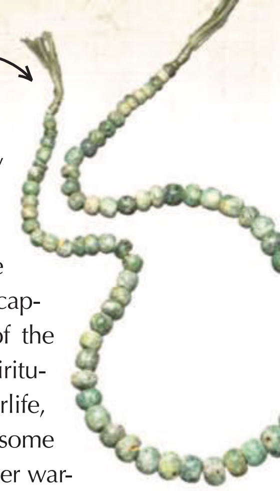


Weapons and shields

Warriors were often depicted wielding maces or clubs of varying shapes and sizes. The mace heads were made of spiked stone rings, with multiple heads being stacked upon each other. The handles are sometimes depicted with patterns, with modern parallels to modern indigenous Nayarit traditional dances where large sticks are similarly painted. Some of these clubs seem large enough on the figurines to seem to represent spears, and obsidian spearheads have indeed been found in a number of tombs. These spearheads are large, with some examples reaching 40cm in length. Thrown stones were the most commonly depicted kind of projectile, yet one terracotta sculpture formerly on display in the Gilcrease museum shows a man posed as to throw a projectile, and in his hands are two un-detailed terracotta rods. These could be an extremely simplified representation of an atlatl, and some smaller spearheads found in Jalisco could point to this, but the evidence is limited.

Shields were small, often depicted as strapped to the arm. In some cases they appear small enough to leave the hand free to hold a mace with both hands. In the Ixtlan and La Playa styles, these shields were either circular, square or rectangular. These are also adorned with geometric patterns in black, yellow and white. The construction of these shields is unknown, yet these are visually similar to Mexica *chīmalli* of later millennia. The nature of warfare across ancient western Mexico is unclear, lacking any sort of written record. Across the many traditions, warriors are well represented as terracotta statues, yet depictions of warfare itself are rare. Some of the few depictions of combat come from farther east, in Jalisco, where a few terracottas have been found of warriors holding captives by the hair. The nature of the statues themselves is likely to spiritually defend the dead in the afterlife, though there is a possibility that some are portraits of the dead. Whether warfare was a ritual, defensive or aggressive act is unknown. The proposed reconstructions are, inevitably, speculative as, unfortunately, relatively little work has been done to appropriately cover the many cultures covered by the broad Tomb Shaft Tradition which covers three states in West Mexico. As a local to this region, this author does hope this does inspire some new interest in this obscure culture.



Jade bead necklace of the Colima or Jalisco cultures.

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This article was made possible with help and support provided by the Regional Museum of Nayarit, who provided sources, images, real pieces to reference and study, and information on modern indigenous Nayarita practices, along with oversight for the reconstructions which illustrate this article. AW

Velite Aquila is a regular contributor to* Ancient Warfare *magazine. Special thanks to Daniel Gallo Arana.

FURTHER READING

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- Rodriguez R.B., & Kraczkowska, A. (2009), *Guerreros de Nayarit. Testimonios de una herencia ancestral*. Arqueologia Mexicana 95, pp. 22-29.
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Ceremonial Blades from the Colima or Jalisco cultures – similar to those seen on Nayarit statuettes.

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DECRYING A BETRAYER OF THE STATE

CARNIFEX ADULESCENS

By Mark McCaffery

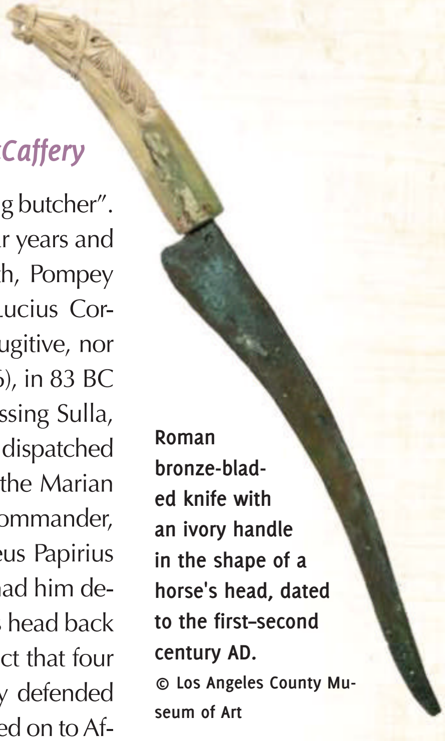
The term *carnifex* may be defined as "scoundrel", "villain", "butcher", or "executioner". Though to convey a sense of the word as understood by the Romans, perhaps it is best to adopt the blunt translation of "meat-maker". Taking the complexities of the term into consideration, it is interesting to note how *carnifex* was utilised as a derogatory slur to degrade political figures deemed to have promoted or inflicted civil strife.

Due to the inherent religious pollution which characterised the work of those in death-related occupations, such workers as undertakers, gravediggers, and professional mourners were required to reside outside the Esquiline Gate, close to the Grove of Libitina near the mass-graves of the poor. Executioners were likewise required to reside there. The *carnifex*, however, would be considered particularly *sordidus*, in part as he profited from his work, but especially because of the responsibility which he bore for the deaths which he inflicted. It was not because they committed state-sanctioned murder; according to Roman law, individuals condemned to death were ceremonially devoted to a deity, thus making them *homo sacer* and so lawful to be killed. Instead, the disgust and repulsion felt towards the *carnifex* stemmed from his role in expelling condemned individuals from the community. In doing so, the pollution to which he was exposed warranted the *carnifex* himself living in exile from his community as long as he continued in his profession.

Despite Plutarch's assertion that Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus as a youth exhibited the attributes of "majesty and kingliness" (*Pompey* 2), the more prominent moniker bestowed upon him in his early career was that of *carnifex adulescens* the "young butcher". Following the turmoil of the civil war years and in the aftermath of his father's death, Pompey sought to ingratiate himself with Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Not wanting to be a "fugitive, nor empty-handed" (Plutarch, *Pompey* 6), in 83 BC Pompey raised three legions, impressing Sulla, and at the age of twenty-four he was dispatched to Sicily. Pompey quickly defeated the Marian faction on the island and when its commander, the three-times former consul Gnaeus Papirius Carbo was brought before him, he had him denounced and murdered, sending his head back to Sulla in Rome; this despite the fact that four years earlier Carbo had successfully defended Pompey in court. Pompey then moved on to Africa, defeating the Marian armies there too, and similarly had its leader put to death. Finally, he went to Spain and repeated the process.

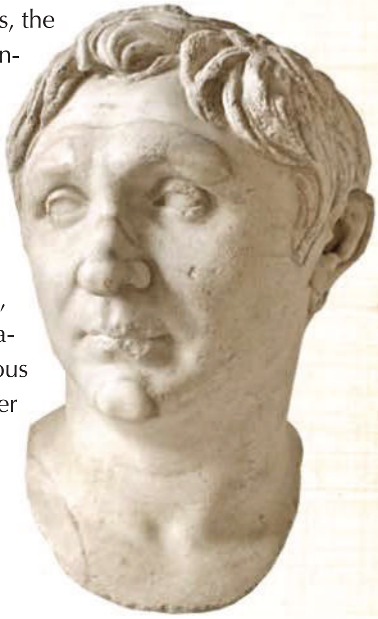
Pompey's reputation as *carnifex adulescens* seems to have solid credentials. Yet *carnifex* in the context of "executioner" denotes more than simple killing. Valerius Maximus (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 6.2) describes this epithet being thrown at Pompey in court deriding these deaths as treacherous acts perpetrated against fellow Romans. Hence, as Sulla's chosen executioner, it is implied that Pompey incurred the same sort of death-pollution as the *carnifices*. In the same sense, Coriolanus received the label *carnifex* when, in 491 BC, he pushed for increased grain prices for Plebeians in time of shortages as a political act of reprisal. Like Pompey, the actions of Coriolanus were denounced as treacherous to the concord of Roman politics. According to Pliny (*Natural History* 29.6), Archagathus, the first physician to migrate from the Peloponnese to Rome in 535 BC was a third example of someone being labelled *carnifex*. His initial popularity regressed into abject loathing by the population on account of his alleged savage use of his knife. One might interpret this as referencing physical brutality at first blush, but the terminology suggests that Archagathus' actions were deemed treacherous and a source of pollution via the improper shedding of Roman blood. AW

Mark McCaffery is a regular contributor.



Roman bronze-bladed knife with an ivory handle in the shape of a horse's head, dated to the first–second century AD.

© Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Bust of Pompey the Great, made in the Augustan period based on an original dated to 70–60 BC.

© Sailko / Wikimedia Commons

Denarius of Sulla and Manlius Torquatus depicting Sulla in a triumphal quadriga chariot, dated to 82 BC.

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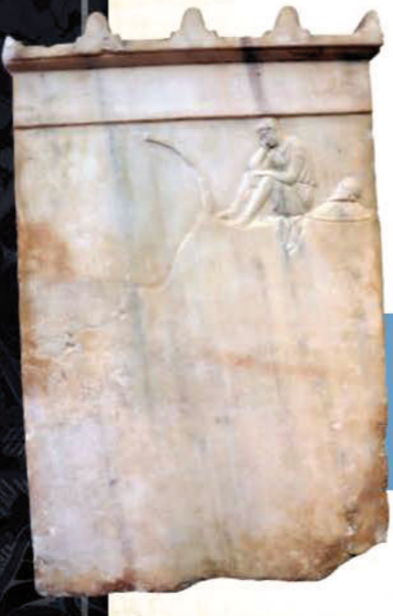
The fortifications on the Hetionean Peninsula protected the port of Piraeus. They were destroyed and rebuilt at least twice in the ancient era.

THE STELE OF DEMOKLEIDES

LOST TO THE SEA

By Jo Ball

In 1881, excavations in the Piraeus, the harbour area of ancient Athens, uncovered a grave stele dedicated to a man named Demokleides. At less than a metre tall, it is not an imposing monument, but one which has an emotional story to tell of a life cut short in the service of Athens. The inscription is short on words, but this monument provides a unique insight into Athenian military commemoration.



The funerary stele of Demokleides has a powerful image of a man sitting forlornly on a ship's prow next to his helmet and shield. It is on display at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

© Furius / Wikimedia Commons

Stelae dedicated to Greeks who died in battle can often seem quite minimalist, especially if you are familiar with tombstones dedicated to Roman soldiers. They are often short on words, doing little more than name the dead soldier. They may, however, feature elaborate portraits of the deceased, sometimes (but not always) in a combat scene. With a few exceptions, Classical Greek soldiers were not professionals — if their deaths had come in warfare, then they would be commemorated as a soldier.

A casualty of war

A powerful example is the grave stele of Demokleides, son of Demetrios, a young man who was presumably from Athens (or Attica), given the location of the stele's discovery. It is short on words — all the inscription reveals is his name and that of his father. However, the accompanying imagery, while also fairly minimalist, paints a much more detailed picture.

The stele contains the image of a young man in a short-sleeved tunic sitting with his knees raised, and his right hand to his head in a traditional mourning pose. Demokleides sits on the prow of a trireme, with its distinctive ram, which fades into a large area of featureless stone, probably the sea; it was likely painted blue. Just behind him is a Corinthian-type helmet and shield, his military equipment which has been laid aside, death allowing him to lay down his arms one final time. The inclusion of this kit strongly suggests that Demokleides died in conflict. Yet, this is not an image which cel-

© George E. Koronaios / Wikimedia Commons

DID YOU KNOW?

Each trireme of Athens' navy had ten hoplites and four archers. These numbers could vary, but they were the offensive and defensive crew of the ship, until heavier galleys arrived to carry more crew.

ebrates heroism or the glory of battle, as many other tombstones did. Instead, the tombstone conveys a sense of great mourning — Demokleides' mourning pose is often seen in civilian stelae. This is not an idealised portrayal of warfare; instead, the stele's imagery evokes the tragedy of conflict, of young lives cut short far from home.

Corinthian-type helmets continued to feature on funeral markers long after they were worn.
© Lauren van Zoonen

Naval iconography is relatively uncommon on grave stelae. The Demokleides stele is the only Classical-period example from Athens to feature a ship — somewhat surprising given the importance of the navy to Athenian power. This bias can possibly be explained by the fact that naval imagery may have not been depicted on the stelae of hoplites, even if they had fought or died in a marine context. Whether Demokleides himself was a hoplite or a rower is unclear, and there are grounds for both. The fact that he received an elaborate stele may suggest that his family was reasonably wealthy, which supports the idea that he was a hoplite. Rowers were typically drawn from the poorer parts of society, and their families were less able to afford elaborate monuments; however, the *polis* could have paid for the stele should it have desired to. Hoplite or rower, his identification as a soldier is still clear.

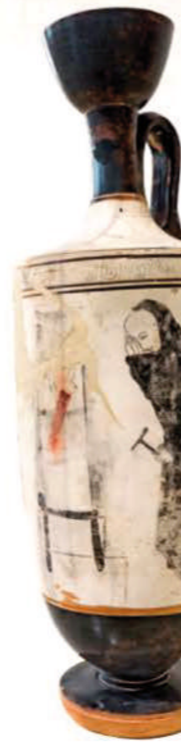
Lost to the sea?

If Demokleides was a casualty of war, is there any way to work out what conflict he might have fallen in? The stele's artistic style suggests that it dates to between 400 and 375 BC. The major conflict involving Athens during this period was the Corinthian War (395-387 BC), between Sparta and a coalition of Athens, Argos, Corinth, and Thebes, supported by the Achaemenid Empire. Unlike other stelae, Demokleides's monument does not give a firm identification of the conflict he fell in.

If Demokleides did die in the Corinthian War, it is difficult to identify the battle he likely died in. The imagery suggests that he was connected to the navy, and presumably died at sea, possibly lost to the water. Yet the major battles of the Corinthian War involving Athenian troops were primarily land-based, at Nemea and Coronea (both 394 BC); the major naval engagement, at Cnidus (also 394 BC) primarily involved the Achaemenid fleet, not the Athenian. He may nevertheless have been a casualty of one of these battles on land, but commemorated by his family with a naval theme for personal reasons. Alternatively, Demokleides may have died in Corinthian War but outside battle — as many would have done — from disease or as a result of an injury sustained while on campaign, or even during a storm.

The stele may even date to a slightly later conflict, such as the Boeotian Wars (379-371 BC), in which Athens provided naval support. It is a less compelling identification as Athens sustained far fewer casualties in this conflict, but remains a possibility. If nothing else, the stele provides a reminder of the frequency of warfare in the Greek world.

Dr. Jo Ball is a regular contributor to* Ancient Warfare *magazine.

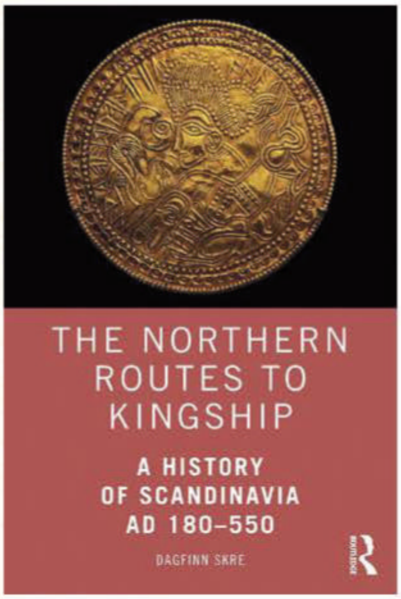

Attic white ground lekythos, ca. 450-440 BC, with an old man in mourning in a gesture similar to that on Demokleides' monument.
© ArchaiOptix / Wikimeida Commons

This Athenian casualty list from 411 BC (during the Peloponnesian War) lists the fallen by tribe.
© TimeTravelRome / Wikimedia Commons

An empty grave

Demokleides' stele is probably a commemorative cenotaph rather than a tombstone. It is almost certain that his body would not have been brought home for burial, whether it was lost at sea or not — in general, the Athenian war-dead were never repatriated. Instead, they received a mass cremation on the battlefield, with a small amount of the resulting ash being brought home for a symbolic public funeral and ceremonial burial. While the logistics of these mass cremations has been questioned in recent years, there is little disagreement over the lack of repatriation. The stele of Demokleides marked an empty grave; perhaps his sad gaze in the image was directed towards the home he would never return to.

Silver tetracrachm of the Persian satrap and admiral Pharnabazos, 410-390 BC, depicting the prow of a ship.
© www.cngcoins.com


THE NORTHERN ROUTES TO KINGSHIP
A HISTORY OF SCANDINAVIA AD 180–550
DAGFINN SKRE
R

The Northern Routes to Kingship
A History of Scandinavia AD 180–550
By Dagfinn Skre
ISBN: 978-1138831384
Routledge (2025) - £39.99

www.routledge.com

Although the history of Scandinavia in the period AD 180–550 is somewhat liminal in terms of Roman history, it is nonetheless fascinating and shows, perhaps, the long arm of Rome. Skre's main argument is that, from around AD 200 onwards, Scandinavian society underwent profound changes — runic writing was conceived (the *futhark*), the first buildings were erected, market sites were established, new burial practices were adopted. The number of Roman items in graves surged, suggesting a close connection with the Roman Empire. Within three centuries, kingship emerged and Skre argues (differing from previous scholarship) that these changes came about from the arrival (or return) of units of Germanic *auxilia* used in Marcus Aurelius' Marcomannic Wars.

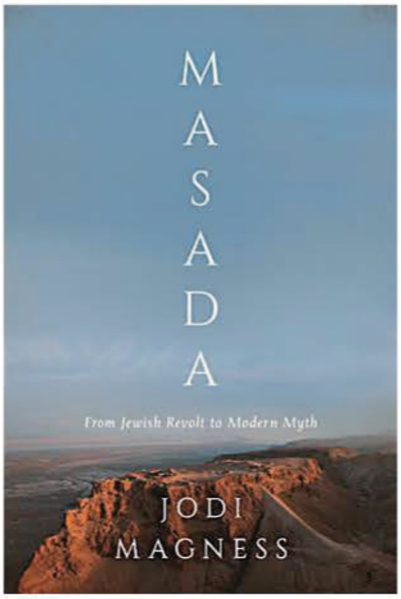
Skre argues that these warriors, armed with experience and new institutional knowledge, seized land and established new lordly centres complete with retainers after the models of Roman allied peoples and tribes. These new lords with their retainers were different to and separate from earlier tribal communities and structures but, because those retainers were professional soldiers, they came to dominate the preexisting tribal structures — whether by alliance, conquest, or mutual benefit. The break-up of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century also provided opportunities for these nascent kingdoms. First, a new group seems to have emigrated at this time to southern Scandinavia. There, they became the kingdom of the Danir (the Danes) with a king — this model was then copied in other parts of Scandinavia. By the sixth century, kingdoms had been established all across Germanic-speaking Scandinavia. Ideas and knowledge of Roman institutions brought back to Scandinavia led those communities on the path to more unified kinships.

Replete with photos, maps, and tables, and an intricate division of contents, this work tells you where you might want to go from the start across its more than 660 pages. Rather than look at Scandinavia kingship through the lens of the medieval sources, Skre "takes a different approach" (p. 2), looking at the "contemporary Roman and Germanic Continental context" from the second century AD to the sixth. Rather than looking at kingship in regard to individual realms or nations, Skre explores the emergence of the concept of kingship: "the very emergence of kingship was also an adaption, an intervention, or an unintended result of societal, economic, and cultural conditions and transformations" (p. 2). Skre is meticulous, exploring the lands, sea routes, and the climate of Scandinavia, all as necessary pathways to understanding how kingship spread in Scandinavia.

He asks: "were southern peoples rather unfamiliar with Scandinavians, and *vice versa*, in the period discussed in this book" (p. 10). To which the answer should be 'no' or 'not as much as we think they were'. Amber, among other products, from the Baltic and Scandinavia had long been traded throughout Europe, and Roman coins turn up in Scandinavia, not to mention the geographers' writings. Skre points out most of these regions were only weeks of rowing away from Rome's borders (a month's marching would get you from the Rhine to Jutland) and the distances by sea and land were not vast. But were such routes actually travelled? Yes, they were, and probably more frequently than we imagine. Skre looks at all these topics in his introduction (pp. 1–18) — each topic is then expanded upon in its own chapter. Skre points out that Germania and Scandinavia were connected (even closely connected) with Rome in the first centuries AD, even after the establishment of borders along the Rhine and Danube. Trade, wars, diplomacy, and recruitment — whether as mercenaries or allies — all provided many connections with Rome. More pertinently, the author points out that, in the wake of the Rome's withdrawal from its former empire in the mid-fifth century AD, many of the communities on its former borders soon embraced kingship in a manner more or less modelled on Rome. Thus, we find kingship among the Suebi, Burgundians, Franks, Visigoths, and in Britain.

My own research led me to explore the possibilities of whether the invention of the Germanic *futhark* came from soldiers in Roman employ in the first centuries AD returning to their homelands with a (Roman) alphabet, which they then adopted and adapted into their own alphabet and writing. Many passages in Skre's book had me muttering 'of course!', even though his approach is a departure from earlier works exploring Scandinavian kingship. This book is a fascinating (and very different) way of looking at the reach and influence of Rome that will challenge and encourage further 'out of the box' thinking.

– Murray Dahm



Masada

From Jewish Revolt to Modern Myth

By Jodi Magness
ISBN: 978-0691167107
Princeton University Press (2019) - £25.00

press.princeton.edu

One of the most infamous events of the First Jewish War was the mass suicide of the defenders of the Herodian mountaintop palace-cum-fortress of Masada circa AD 73. The defenders' refusal to submit has become one of the foundation stories of the modern state of Israel. In *Masada*, Jodi Magness, examines the story of the Jewish rebels' defiance of the Roman Empire. Drawing on a variety of recent archaeological discoveries, reinterpretations of previous finds, and literary accounts, Magness delivers a compelling account of the rebels last stand in the palace fortress of King Herod and its role in the history of Israel.

Although there have been numerous published accounts of the mass suicide of the defenders of Masada, this book is valuable because it draws on modern research to challenge the Masada myth, while also adding to what little we know about the beleaguered defender's lives. We find out, for example, much about how the defenders likely spent their last days, what they ate, living conditions, and how they worshipped. In particular, I found the discussion around the identification of "Miqveh" to be enlightening. A Miqveh is a Jewish ritual bath, usually stepped and plastered, which is used for purification rituals. Consequently, the presence of a Miqveh in an archaeological site is significant as it denotes the existence of a group of Jews following biblical laws of purity. Between sixteen and twenty-one have been identified at the Masada site. Based on this, it has been proposed that this suggests that King Herod was a practicing Jew since some of the Miqveh date to the pre-revolt era of the fortress' existence. However, as Magness explains, identifying a Miqveh is often contentious as it is difficult to differentiate between a ritual bath and a simple pool or reservoir.

As well as deepening our understanding of the defender's lives, Magness explores various alternative versions of the story of the siege. These include the possibility that there was no mass suicide in the way that Josephus describes, and that the fighting continued even after the Romans entered the fortress. For instance, there is an intriguing possibility based on an alternative interpretation of the archaeological evidence that the defenders used Herod's Northern Palace as a fall-back position. The presence of an earthen rampart here, could, according to one archaeologist, be evidence of a second Roman siege ramp that they raised to break into the last stronghold of the zealots. As with much of the Masada site, however, it is difficult to confidently match such finds with specific events of the siege and so, in the absence of other literary sources, such arguments must remain speculative. While some of these arguments have been presented elsewhere, Magness skilfully draws them all together to deepen our understanding of the Masada story, while simultaneously demonstrating how the established Masada myth is reliant on a thin veneer of questionable evidence.

Much of the book focusses on contextualising the siege both socially as well as geographically. Chapter one offers a succinct introduction to the siege of Masada, most significantly examining Josephus' *Jewish War*, the only extant written source that describes the siege and the mass suicide story. Chapter two examines how the Masada site was rediscovered in the 19th and 20th centuries, while chapter three studies the environment of the site and surrounding landscape. Chapters four through seven look at the history of pre-Herodian Judaea, Judaea in the reign of Herod, and then the First Jewish Revolt. Chapter eight describes the life and death of the rebel defenders, and finally chapter nine examines the role of Masada in the foundation story of modern Israel.

One aspect of the traditional story of the siege of Masada that Magness does not challenge, however, is the length of the siege. According to traditional interpretations the siege lasted several years, the longevity of the rebels' defiant yet hopeless last stand forming a key part of the Masada myth in later Jewish history. Recent scholarship suggests that the siege likely lasted only a matter of weeks based on the speed at which the Roman siege works and assault ramp could have been constructed. While the author acknowledges that the complete lack of literary source evidence other than Josephus' problematic account makes any deconstruction of the precise story of the siege itself extremely difficult, I was surprised that the supposed length of the siege was not specifically challenged. However, this is perhaps a minor point in the wider context of the aims of the book, while also demonstrating that the established story of the siege is still evolving.

Masada should be considered an essential read for anyone interested in better understanding the events of the First Jewish War and the siege of Masada in particular. AW

– David Hiscocks

ANCIENT WARFARE *readings*

OFFICERS AND COMMANDERS

What do we know about the men that led ancient armies and called the shots for everyone else? Here are some books and articles to check out.

UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT BATTLE:

COMBAT IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD FROM THE UNIT COMMANDER'S PERSPECTIVE

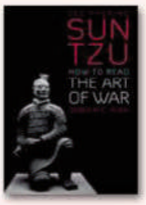
UNDERSTANDING
ANCIENT BATTLE
HUGH ELTON

By Hugh Elton
Pen & Sword Press, 2024
ISBN: 978-1526753979

Elton here examines the battle of the officer – how units manoeuvred and fought in different periods. Elton analyses the interaction of equipment, morale, leadership, and terrain in a series of case studies of twenty-four battles which include Marathon, Issus, Cannae, Cynoscephalae, Mons Graupius, and Adrianople.

DECIPHERING SUN TZU:

HOW TO READ 'THE ART OF WAR

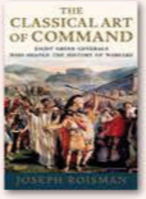


By Derek M.C. Yuen
Oxford University Press, 2014
ISBN: 978-0197649696

Balancing a western and Chinese interpretation, Yuen explores this enigmatic work and shows its continuing significance to warfare. Placing the work in its original historical context, Yuen explores the impact of Chinese philosophy, and examines the themes within the work which can appear over familiar (but have been widely misunderstood and misinterpreted).

THE CLASSICAL ART OF COMMAND:

EIGHT GREEK GENERALS WHO SHAPED THE HISTORY OF WARFARE



By Joseph Roisman
Oxford University Press, 2017
ISBN: 978-0199985821

Roisman takes great Greek commanders and examines their careers for the marks they left on their own states and on warfare more generally. Exploring the design and execution of these generals' campaigns, Roisman also emphasises the importance of their personalities, and examines the changing world of command.

COMMANDERS AND COMMAND IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC AND EARLY EMPIRE

Commanders
& Command

By Fred K. Drogula
University of North Carolina Press, 2021
ISBN: 978-1469668688

Drogula studies the development of Roman provincial command using the known Latin terms and concepts from the Early Republic onwards. He argues that command was not a uniform concept, but a dynamic set of ideas shaped by tradition. As the Roman state grew, concepts of authority, control over territory, and military power underwent continual transformation.

Other articles and publications

- Boorman, S. (2024). *Three Faces of Sun Tzu: Analyzing Sun Tzu's Art of War, A Manual on Strategy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
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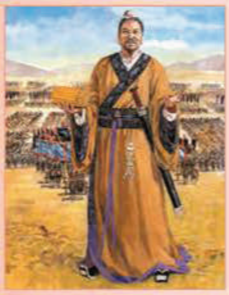
ON THE COVER: Command and conquer



Sun Tzu (or Sun Zi) was a commander and military theorist who is traditionally dated to ca. 544-496 BC during the Spring and Autum Period of Chinese history (ca. 770-481 BC). He is regarded as the author of the highly influential *Art of War*. This may have been presented to king Helu (or Helü) of Wu (r. 514-495 BC). However, the text may be later and there is some doubt if Sun Tzu was a real person at all. For example, the traditional dates for his lifespan make him an almost exact contemporary with the philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC). The text may date to a century later, in which case it is, peculiarly and intriguingly, contemporary to the first Greek works in the art of war in the early 4th century BC. Nonetheless, the *Art of War* became one of the most influential works on military strategy and leadership, a status it continues to hold in the 21st century.

Here, we see Sun Tzu, presenting his treatise to the viewer, ready to pass on the secrets and precepts contained in the *Art of War*. Note how the text is written on a scroll made from strips of bamboo.

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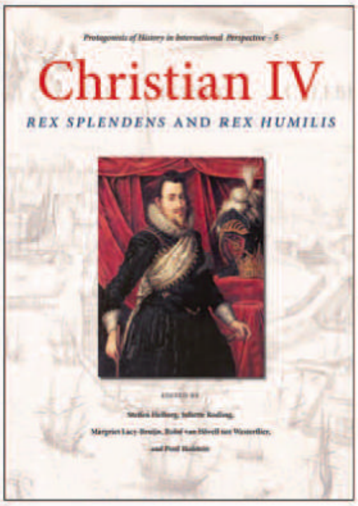
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REX SPLENDENS AND REX HUMILIS

CHRISTIAN IV: REX SPLENDENS AND REX HUMILIS

Edited by Steffen Heiberg, Juliette Roding, Margriet Lacy-Bruijn et al.
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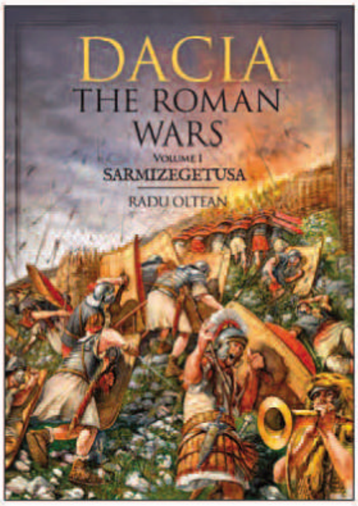
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DACIA: THE ROMAN WARS VOL. 1, SARMIZEGETUSA

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MEDIEVAL WARFARE
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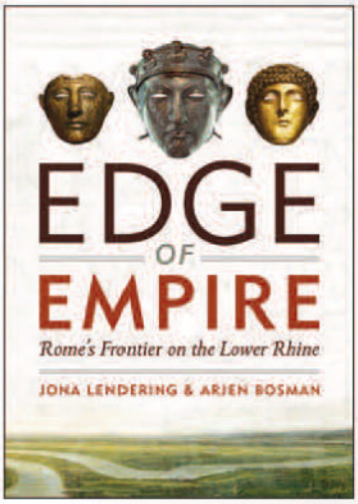
EDGE OF EMPIRE
Rome's Frontier on the Lower Rhine
JONA LENDERING & ARJEN BOSMAN

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By Jona Lendering and Arjen Bosman
ISBN: 978-94-90258-05-4
194-page harback, full-color

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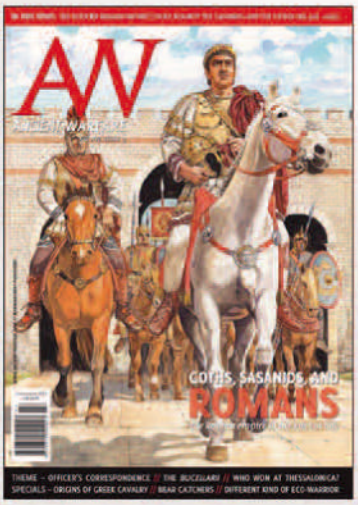
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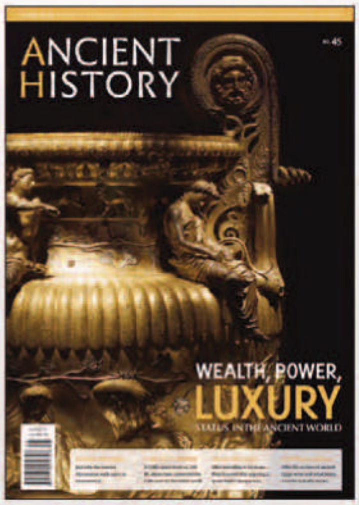
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